

Metarbitrariness?

Book 1

2012

RMIT

Harold Fallon
Civil Engineer Architect

Senior Supervisor : Prof. Richard Blythe
Second Supervisor : Prof. Johan Verbeke
Second Supervisor : Prof. Martyn Hook
Special Supervisor : Prof. Ranulph Glanville

Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Harold Fallon', with a stylized, flowing script.

Harold Fallon

31 August 2012

BOOK 1

Table of content

Foreword	7
1. The context of an emerging practice in a deconstructed field	26
2. Ambitions for an attitude in a deconstructed field	51
2a. Metarbitrariness?	
2b. The practice is the discourse (and vice-versa)	
2c. Stepping back, Straightness, Precision	
3. Charting the practice	83
4. A few tracks through the chart	115
4a. Track of Spatial Genericity	
4b. Track of Structural Strategies	
4c. Track of Modi Operandi	
4d. Track of Praxemes and the Frameworks	
4e. Crooked Path	
4f. Exhibition track	
5. Exhibition record	161
6. Communities of practice	187
6a. Diffuse Community	
6b. Research Community	
6c. Referential Community	
7. Stepping outside architecture with architecture	203
Bibliography	223

Foreword

This doctoral work by design practice is developed about and through the design work of AgwA. It aims to name, understand, contextualize and develop further the context, the ambitions, the reality and the perspectives of the practice.

The PhD process is structured around the participation of «GRC's» (Graduate Research Conferences) that are organized by RMIT and Sint Lucas (KULeuven) twice a year in Ghent. During these GRCs, the practice, and the progress on the doctoral work was discussed with a changing panel of reviewers. In doing so, gaps were detected and filled. New perspectives and shifts in the practice were detected (or provoked) and explored.

It is of importance to mention that my partner, Benoît Vandenbulcke, is undertaking a doctoral research on the role of materiality in design processes, which is explored through the practice of various architects. The reflections and analyses linked to this research have been thoroughly discussed and became part of the background of the practice. Although this doctoral thesis is fuelled by the practice through the analytical methodology, it remains independent from the practice.

The output of the PhD consists in two books, an exhibition, and the recording of the completion seminary.

In regard of the methodology, it is useful to refer to Leon Van Schaik's description of the model published in the Sint Lucas 'Reflections' and to the 'Creative Practice Paper' which documents the April 2012 Ghent PRS lecture.

- Leon van Schaik, Richard Blythe, Marcelo Stamm. 'Creative Practice Research: What We Do, How We Do It, and What We Discover.' RMIT/Sint Lucas Practice Research Symposium, April 2012. Edited transcript of keynote lecture.

- Leon van Schaik. 'Design Practice Research: the Method'. in *Reflections + 6*, Hogeschool Voor Wetenschap & Kunst, Sint-Lucas (internal document).

Other useful literature in this regard is listed below:

- SCHAIK, L. V. 2003. *The Practice of Practice: research in the medium of design*, Melbourne, RMIT University Press.

- SCHAIK, L. V. 2005. *Mastering Architecture: Becoming a Creative Innovator in Practice* (Architecture in Practice), John Wiley and Sons.

- SCHAIK, L. V. 2008. *Spatial Intelligence: New futures for architecture*, Chichester, UK, John Wiley & Sons.

- SCHAIK, L. V. & JOHNSON, A. (eds.) 2011 *By Practice, By Invitation: Design Practice Research at RMIT*. Melbourne: onepointsixone.

- SCHAIK, L. V. & SPOONER, M. (eds.) 2010. *The Practice of Practice 2: Research in the Medium of Design*, Melbourne: School of Architecture and Design, RMIT University.

BOOK 1

The first book (this one) corresponds to the doctoral research.

First, it settles the context of the practice, its situation and interrogations (chapter 1)

Second, our ambitions for the practice are evoked. The practice is not the fulfillment of a precise metaphysical or political agenda, but it is important to understand what we had in mind, and what ambitions were to understand how the practice developed. (chapter 2)

The two first chapter consist mainly of a careful assemblage of fragments from papers, discussions, writings and e-mails, that allow the reader to see what the intentions, interrogations and ambitions were, rather than to be told about them.

Third, and this is the core of the research, a chart is developed, which allows to «navigate» the practice, following the discoveries and themes that were developed through the practice and the research. Five non limiting «navigation tracks» are proposed. The «chart» is to be understood as a plan of the exhibition and as a table of contents, that refers to the elements that are developed in the second book. (chapters 3 and 4)

Then, the community of practice is evoked and structured. It is not the idea to give an exhaustive analysis of this community here, but rather to structure it, in order to shed light on the references and the glimpses of the community that are present through the two books and in the chart. (chapter 5)

Last, a conclusive chapter evokes limitations and perspectives for the practice. (chapter 6)

BOOK 2

The second book is the documentation part: it is an expanded version of the chart, in which each element is developed. The second book is intended as a non-linear collection, though linear reading is of course possible. Pages are numbered by the position of the elements in the chart.

Metarbitrariness? : Contribution to the field

The doctoral process and the result thereof have made the practice better: more precise, more coherent, more conscious. The practice is evolving now towards unexplored fields, which would probably not have been possible without the kind of reflections developed in the PhD.

The communication of the practice, its internal processes and goals, has been greatly improved. We already experienced this in various lectures, as we were able to speak about the ambitions and processes directly, instead of staying on a descriptive level, as it often happens.

This is also the case for the research process, which I intended to trace as precisely as possible. Hopefully, the methods used for the research can be useful for fellow researchers by design practice.

The relationship with the community of practice is equally important to mention: the community is not merely a feeding reference field of heroes. Through the practice, their work is questioned and framed. In a way, the practice re-situates and sheds new light on the community.

Last, the context in which our practice emerged and developed, is not exceptional: many architects would probably recognize similarities with their own situation and the context of lack of masters we evoke, about the fragmentation of the field, and the issue of arbitrariness. In Belgium and in the neighbouring countries, we see lots of new, rather young architecture practices emerging. They probably all face the same situation: a complex world, a lack of stable references, almost infinite technical possibilities, a fragmentation of the profession in favor of technical consultants, and probably also the difficulty to survive economically.

I do not pretend that we developed a solution to this context, but rather, my hope is that the explication of our (re)search for a coherent attitude beyond the problem of the arbitrary may be useful to others, and thus contribute somehow to the general and ongoing evolution of contemporary architecture practice.



Touring Lanaken (images published on www.agwa.be between 2008 and 2010)

questioning the sense and pertinence of architecture today

AgwA

«AgwA architecture office was founded in 2003 in Brussels. Its founding partners are Harold Fallon and Benoît Vandenbulcke.

Avoiding the superficiality of «contemporary aesthetics» and the ease of ready-made ideas, AgwA puts an important effort on the understanding of the fundamental issues of each project. To (re)formulate the problem correctly is an important step towards its solution.

The architectural work of the office is increasingly acclaimed by peers and by the critics. AgwA took part in various exhibitions and its work is being published in Belgian and international specialised press. As a consequence of this and of the involvement of the partners, AgwA is actively teaching and researching at various universities, principally at the Louvain School of Polytechnics (UCL) and at the Hogeschool voor Wetenschap en Kunst Sint Lucas in Brussels and Ghent, with PhDs ongoing at the UCL (Belgium) and RMIT (Melbourne).

Besides its strictly architectural and planning practices, AgwA also proposes architectural and technical consulting services for clients such as Tractebel/Technum (Suez) and IBA. The office is fully capable of managing complex teams with multiple professional stakeholders, while preserving high conceptual and architectural value.»

next pages, complete projects list 2003-2012

«Team :	Harold Fallon	engineer architect UCL, partner, teacher at Sint Lucas
	Benoît Vandenbulcke	engineer architect UCL, partner, teacher at UCL
	Bastien Pilet	architect ULg (2009-...)
	Julien Delmotte	engineer architect KULeuven (2009-...)
	Benoît Burquel	engineer architect ULg (2011-...)
	Griet Kuppens	architect Sint Lucas (2011-...)
	Michiel De Potter	engineer architect KULeuven (2012-...)

Former collaborators :

Agnieszka Winiarska	architect Paris-Malaquais (2012)
Christophe Mattar	architect EPFL (ch) (2011-2012)
Friederike Vondran	architect Newcastle University (2011)
Guillaume Becker	architect Horta (2008-2011)
Raphaël Cornelis	engineer architect (UCL), partner (2008)
Charlie Petit	architect La Cambre (2009)
Pieter Coelis	engineer architect KULeuven (2008)
María Evelia Macal	architect, urbanist UCA (2006-2007)
Jan Hoffman	architect (2008)
Jeremy Commenne	engineer architect UCL (2008)
Corentin Fivet	engineer architect UCL (2008)»

Portfolio, general presentation, AgwA, 2012

Aknowledgement is due to the collaborators involved in the development of the office and of its projects.



MOLENBEEK
creche, evening school, pavilion
Budget : 2.790.000,00 € excl VAT
Year : 2012
Client : City of Molenbeek
Team: AgwA + ZED + JZH
Type : invited competition
Status : (unknown)



NIEL
construction of a sports hall, Niel
Budget : 1.050.000,00 € excl VAT
Year : prevision for 2014
Client : Igean
Team: AgwA
Type : new construction
Status : building permit phase



DEINZE
cultural center and underground parking
Budget : 12 000 000 € excl VAT
Year : 2011
Client : City of Deinze
Team: AgwA + TTAS + Kahle
acoustics + Mouton
Type : invited competition



ELISABETH
Construction of 5 dwellings in Schaerbeek
Budget : 1.050.000,00 € excl VAT
Year : prevision for 2014
Client : Renovas
Team : AgwA + JZH partners
Type : invited competition, 1st prize
Status : works tender



MARNI
refurbishment of a theater, Brussels
Budget : 2.000.000 € excl VAT
Year : 2011
Client : CFWB
Team: AgwA + Delta GC + Commins
Acoustics + Boydens + Ar-Te
Type : invited competition - 3rd



MORLANWELZ
library, Morlanwelz
Budget : 1.240.000,00 € excl VAT
Year: 2012
Client : City of Morlanwelz
Team: AgwA + OLM + Speculoos + Greisch + Mathieu-G + Kahle
Type : invited competition - 3rd prize



ANETHAN
construction of 6 dwellings + workshop
Budget : 735 000 € excl VAT
Year : 2011
Client : Renovas
Team: AgwA + JZH
Type : invited competition
Status : 3rd



VAL BENOIT
requalification of the Val Benoît, Liège
Budget : 81.600.000 € excl VAT
Year : 2011
Client : SPI +
Team: AgwA + NGiA + Greisch
Type : invited competition
Status : 2nd prize of the jury



BADVÖSLAU
School campus, Austria
Budget : -
Year : 2010
Client : Bundesimmobiliensch, Austria
Team: AgwA
Type : open competition
Status : -



MASSART
construction of a pavilion, Brussels
Budget : 415.000 € excl VAT
Year : 2011
Client : IBGE/BIM
Team: AgwA + Vers.A + JZH&Parners
Type : concours sur invitation
Status : 2nd

2011



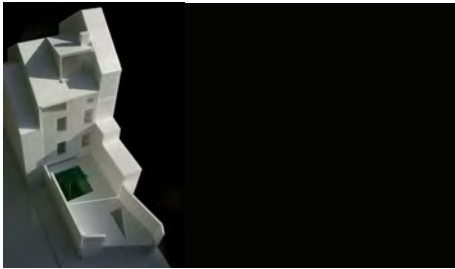
DUBRUCQ

Kindergarten and housing
Budget : 1.500.000,00 € excl VAT
Year : 2011
Client : commune of Molenbeek
Team: AgwA + JZH & Partners
Type : invited competition
Status : 3rd



SINT LUCAS GENT

extension of an architecture school
Budget : 600.000 € excl VAT
Year : 2010
Client : Hogeschool WenK Sint Lucas
Team : AgwA + Bjorn Gielen
Type : open two stages competition
Status : 2e stage



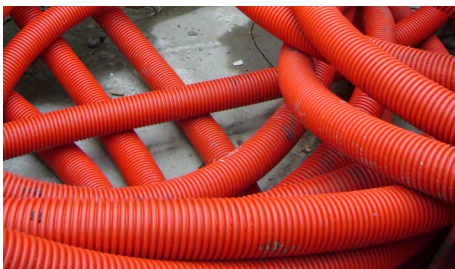
HAL65

refurbishment of a 4 appartements house
Budget : 550.000,00 €
Date : 2009
Client : Saint Gilles, Brussels
Team : AgwA + Ferrière + JZH
Type : refurbishment
Status : construction running



NIVELLES04

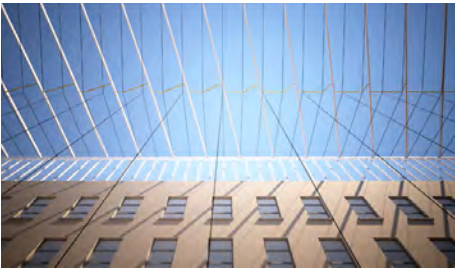
three low energy houses in Nivelles
Budget : 530.000,00 € excl VAT
Year : 2009
Client : private
Team : AgwA + JZH + Détang
Type : construction
Status : construction running



IBA

Proton therapy centres Europe
Budget : -
Year : 2009
Client : IBA Ion Beam Applications
Team: AgwA
Type : Consultancy
Status : ongoing

2009



BANQUE

glass roof National Bank of Belgium
Budget : 9.500.000,00 € excl VAT
Year : 2011
Client : Banque Nationale de Belgique
Team: AgwA + RFR + Boydens + GBAR
Type : concours sur invitation
Status : -



FORT VI

construction of a high level sports school
Budget : 7.650.000 € excl VAT
Year : 2011
Client : AG VESPA
Team: AgwA + Landinzicht + Mouton + Boydens
Type : invited competition



JEUNES

construction of a youth house in Vorst
Budget : 600.000,00 €
Date : 2009
Client : Commune of Vorst
Team : AgwA + Ferrière + JZH
Type : construction
Status : tendering running



PERONNES

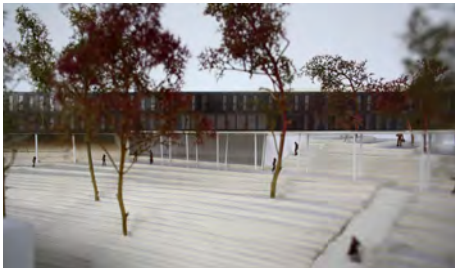
ADEPS sports centre
Budget : 6.189.000,00 € excl VAT
Year : 2009, works planned 2013
Client : CFWB
Team : AgwA+Artgineering+Ney+Boydens
Type : invited competition, 1st prize
Status : tendering running



CLAES

construction of single family house
Budget : 250.000,00 €
Date : 2009
Client : Commune de Saint-Gilles
Team : AgwA
Type : invited competition
Status : construction running

2009



NEUFCHATEAU

100 rooms for an ADEPS sports centre
Budget : 3.000.000,00 € excl VAT
Year : 2009
Client : CFWB, infrastructures sportives
Team: AgwA+ OLM + Ney & partners
Type : invited competition
Status : 2nd



STAVELOT

cultural centre in Stavelot
Budget : 2.000.000,00 € excl VAT
Year : 2009
Client : SPI Liège
Team : AgwA + Artau + Ar-Te
Type : invited competition
Status : 2nd



PLANTES

Elderly housing
Budget : 1.588.250,00 €
Date : 2009
Client : sclr fs e.mm.a
Team : AgwA + Ferrière
Type : invited competition
Status : 2nd



SUD

feasibility study
Budget : 1.282.947,00 €
Date : 2009
Client : UCL university
Team : AgwA
Type : feasibility study
Status : completed



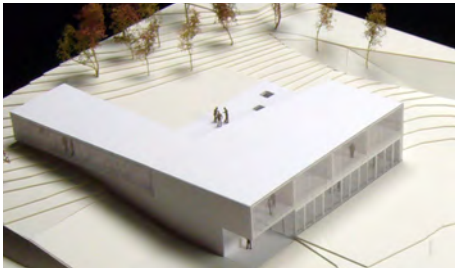
RIO

Contundaba sea tower
Budget : -
Date : 2008
Client : ARQUITECTUM
Team : AgwA
Type : competition
Status : -



EAU D'HEURE

sports hall in Froidchapelle
Budget : 2.000.000,00 € excl VAT
Year : 2009
Client : CFWB
Team: AgwA + Weinand + Seca
Type : invited competition
Status : 4th



RIVA

school on the campus of Riva-Bella
Budget : 990.000,00 €
Date : 2009
Client : CFWB
Team : AgwA + Ney + Seca
Type : invited competition
Status : 3rd



TOMB

Transformation of a retail surface
Budget : 450.000,00 €
Date : 2008
Client : Creacorner
Team : AgwA
Type : transformation
Status : completed



NIV 02

Overhang in Nivelles
Budget : -
Date : 2008
Client : private
Team : AgwA
Type : extension
Status : completed



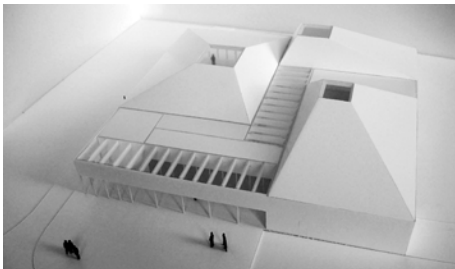
CARRE DES ARTS

Carré des Arts Cultural Center
Budget : 3.000.000,00 €
Client : CFWB
Team : AgwA + Ney + Ducks
scéno + Kahle acoustics
Type : refurbishment
Status : running

2008



VORST
Social housing in Vorst
Budget : 1.794.400,00 €
Date : 2008
Client : Forest, Brussels
Team : AgwA+Ferrière
Type : invited competition
Status : 2nd prize



PHIL
school campus & restaurant
Budget : 1.475.000,00 €
Date : 2008
Client : CFWB
Team : AgwA + Artgineering
+ Ney +Boydens
Type : invited competition - 2nd



AUDERGHEM
house extension
Budget : 150.000,00 €
Date : 2007
Client : private
Team : AgwA + JZH
Type : refurbishment
Status : completed



GRIBAUMONT
Extension of a house
Budget : -
Date : construction 2007
Client : (private)
Team : AgwA
Type : extension
Status : completed



MOSC
Feasibility study, Moscow
Budget : -
Date : 2008
Client : private
Team : AgwA
Type : feasibility study
Status : -



OASE
construction of a thermal center, Holland
Budget : 1.588.250,00 €
Date : 2008
Client : Movement Entertainment
Team : AgwA
Type : new construction
Status : on hold



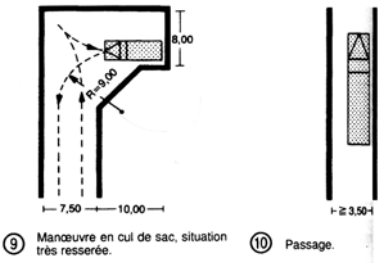
BPS22
BPS22 contemporary arts platform
Budget : 3.281.269,00 €
Date : 2008
Client : Hainaut Province
Team : AgwA + Matador
Type : invited competition
Status : 4th prize



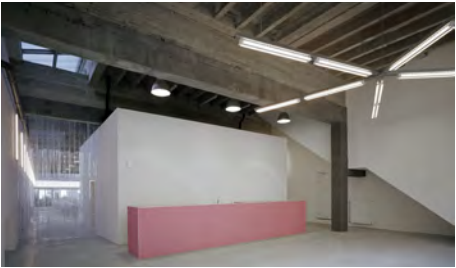
VERTIGO
Théming of a ride
Budget : 400.000,00 €
Date : 2006
Client : Walibi Belgium
Team : AgwA + Greisch
Type : new construction
Status : 1st prize, completed



VERTIGOSHOP
Design of a shopping point at Vertigo
Budget : -
Date : 2006
Client : Walibi Belgium
Team : AgwA
Type : new construction
Status : completed



TRACTEBEL
Technical and architectural consulting
Budget : -
Date : 2007-...
Client : TRACTEBEL (SUEZ)
Team : AgwA
Type : consultance
Status : realized & ongoing



METAL
sports hall, evening school, housing
Budget : 1.527.730,90 €
Date: 2006, construction 2008
Client : Sint-Gillis, Brussels
Team : AgwA + Ferrière+ JZH
Type : refurbishment
Status : completed



CENTRAL STATION
pedestrian tunnel refurbishment
Surface : -
Client : Beliris
Team : AgwA + Tractebel
Type : invited competition
Status : 4th prize



LINZ
European 9 competition at Linz, Austria,
Budget : -
Date: 2007
Client : European
Team: AgwA
Type : competition
Status : -



VMSW
Social housing in Beveren, Belgium
Budget : -
Date : 2007
Client : VMSW
Team : AgwA
Type : competition
Status : -



LANAKEN
Lookout tower, national park of Lanaken
Budget : -
Date : 2006
Client : Gemeente Lanaken
Team : AgwA+ Greisch
Type : competition
Status : -



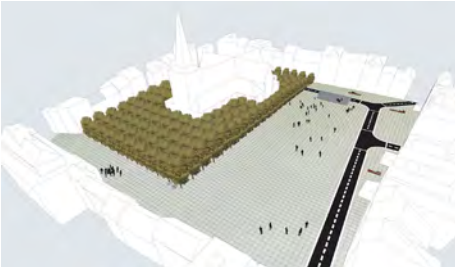
XL07 ANTWERPEN
Social housing in Antwerpen (VMSW)
Budget : -
Date : competition 2007
Client : VMSW
Team : AgwA
Type : competition
Status : 3d prize



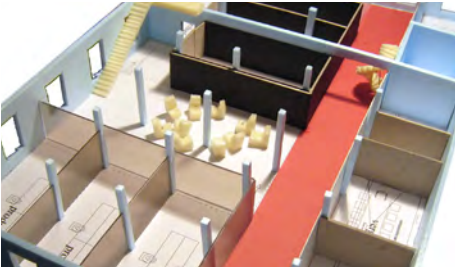
XL07 GENK
Social housing in Genk (VMSW),
Budget : -
Date : 2007
Client : VMSW
Team : AgwA
Type : XL 07 competition
Status : -



TRIODOS
refurbishment Triodos Belgium
Budget : 300.000,00 €
Date: 2006
Client : TRIODOS BANK
Team: AgwA + Ferrière SPRL
Type : consultancy
Status : completed



TURNHOUT
Marketplace refurbishment, Turnhout
Budget : -
Date : 2006
Client : Turnhout
Team : AgwA
Type : competition
Status : -



CZAR
Film production offices
Budget : ±300.000,00 €
Date : 2006
Client : CZAR/CCCP
Team : AgwA + RAUW
Type : transformation
Status : hold on



MYCARPET
Modular workspace and computer bag
Budget : -
Date : 2006
Client : Stichting Interieur
Team : AgwA + Ester Goris
Type : competition
Status : Honorable mention



KOKNESE
Latvian memorial, Koknese, Latvia
Budget : -
Date : 2005
Client : Koknese foundation
Team : AgwA
Type: competition
Status : -



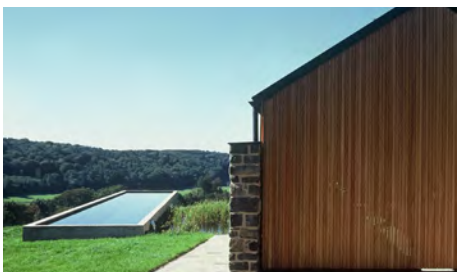
HANZINELLE
House transformation
Budget : ± 350.000,00 €
Date : 2004
Client : private
Team : AgwA+ JZH
Type : transformation
Status : completed



BINO
Reusable art pavilion, Calgary
Budget : -
Date : 2005
Client : Calgary Art Fair
Team : AgwA
Type : competition
Status : -



ROOD *Artist workshop, Brussels*
Budget : 50 000,00 €
Date : 2005
Client : private
Team : AgwA
Type: refurbishment
Status : completed



JASS
Barn and pool, jassogne, Belgium
Budget : 150.000,00 €
Date : 2005
Client : private
Team: AgwA
Type : construction
Status : completed



GDCH *Extension of a house*
Budget : ±100.000,00 €
Date : 2005
Client : private
Team : AgwA
Type : extension
Status : -



EMBA
Pier and boat shelter
Budget : -
Date : 2004
Client : private
Team : AgwA
Type : construction
Status : hold on



NIJVEL
Refurbishment of a dovecote into housing
Budget : ± 150.000,00 €
Date : 2005
Client : private
Team : AgwA
Type : transformation
Status : completedv



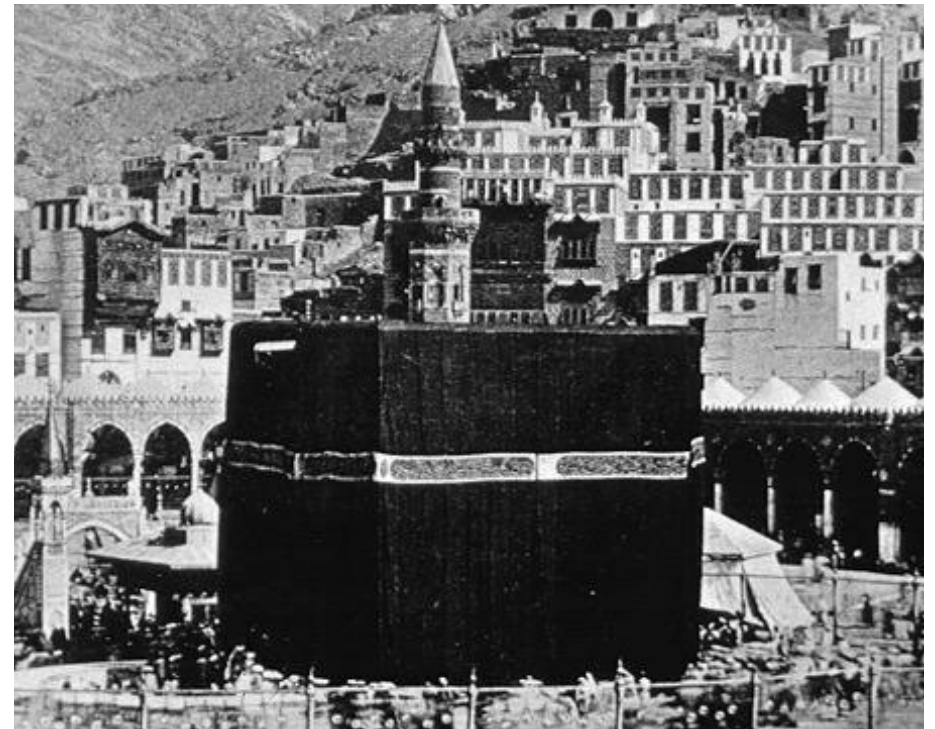
FLAGEY
Refurbishment Flagey square, Brussels
Budget : -
Date : 2003
Client : Flagey Platform
Team : AgwA
Type : ideas competition
Status : 2nd prize

1. The context of an emerging practice in a deconstructed field

Arranged fragments, 2003-2012

“As an introduction to settle the context and ambitions of our practice, I would prefer to make exclusive use of fragments of past discussions and writings to evoke my state of mind, instead of writing a new text for the purpose of it. It would seem strange to me to write artificially ABOUT my intentions, when I can simply SHOW them by arranging real fragments. Instead of having people BELIEVE what I say, I prefer to have them KNOW what I think.”

extract from an e-mail exchange, 04 july 2012



Kaaba, Mecca

The evidence of the thing that is, beyond architectural discourse

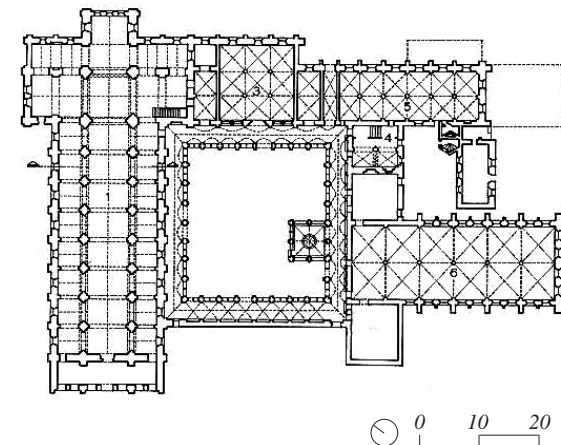
“I could write a brief comment on each fragment, reference, quote, in order to introduce its context and its evolutions/repercussions, but I feel a bit uneasy in doing so for two reasons.

First, I feel it would endanger the strength of the juxtaposition of the fragments. My intention is that the fragments, quotes and references “feed”, amend and contextualize each other. If I systematically explain why I have chosen a fragment, what has changed since then, and so on, I feel it won't work anymore as a whole, but rather as a collection of findings. Instead, the coherences and dissonances of the fragments create a moving cloud that is significant in itself.

Second, the research is not about the context of the practice, the philosophical meta-level and the way it evolved. It is about how the practice evolved knowing that there is a context of meta-level preoccupations and ambitions. In fact, this meta-level was very explicitly present at the start of the research. It was presented as a kind of explicit agenda for the practice. Then, it disappeared completely in favor of the pragmatic exploration of the practice (you know, fighting close to the bull). At the end, it reappeared as an implicit agenda of our practice, which is simply concerned by the making of architecture. If I insist too much on these contextualizing metaphysical fragments, or move the gravitational center of the book in this direction, it might give the impression that the practice is a kind of illustration of a metaphysical agenda, which is not the case. When we make projects, we make projects. We cut foam, make plans, sections and images, develop structures and choose materialities. What we make is architecture, not architectural equivalents of philosophy or something.

Well, now that I write this, I understand that it is not completely true anymore. Recently, we engaged in different paths, which are not only concerned about the operational modes of the making of architecture. I'll tell more about this in the conclusion of the book.”

extract from an e-mail to R. Blythe, R. Glanville, 10 July 2012



Abbey of Fontenay, 1139-1200

*The composition is a careful but evolving arrangement of autonomous elements.
There is no intercession of articulating items or spaces.
There is no subservience of the parts to the whole.*

Introduction Architecture is a hazardous mixture of omnipotence and impotence. Ostensibly involved in “shaping” the world, for their thoughts to be mobilized architects depend on the provocations of others—clients, individual or institutional. Therefore, incoherence, or more precisely, randomness, is the underlying structure of all architects' careers: they are confronted with an arbitrary sequence of demands, with parameters they did not establish, in countries they hardly know, about issues they are only dimly aware of, expected to deal with problems that have proved intractable to brains vastly superior to their own. Architecture is by definition a *chaotic adventure*.

Koolhaas, R., 1995, 'S, M, L, XL', 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, p xix

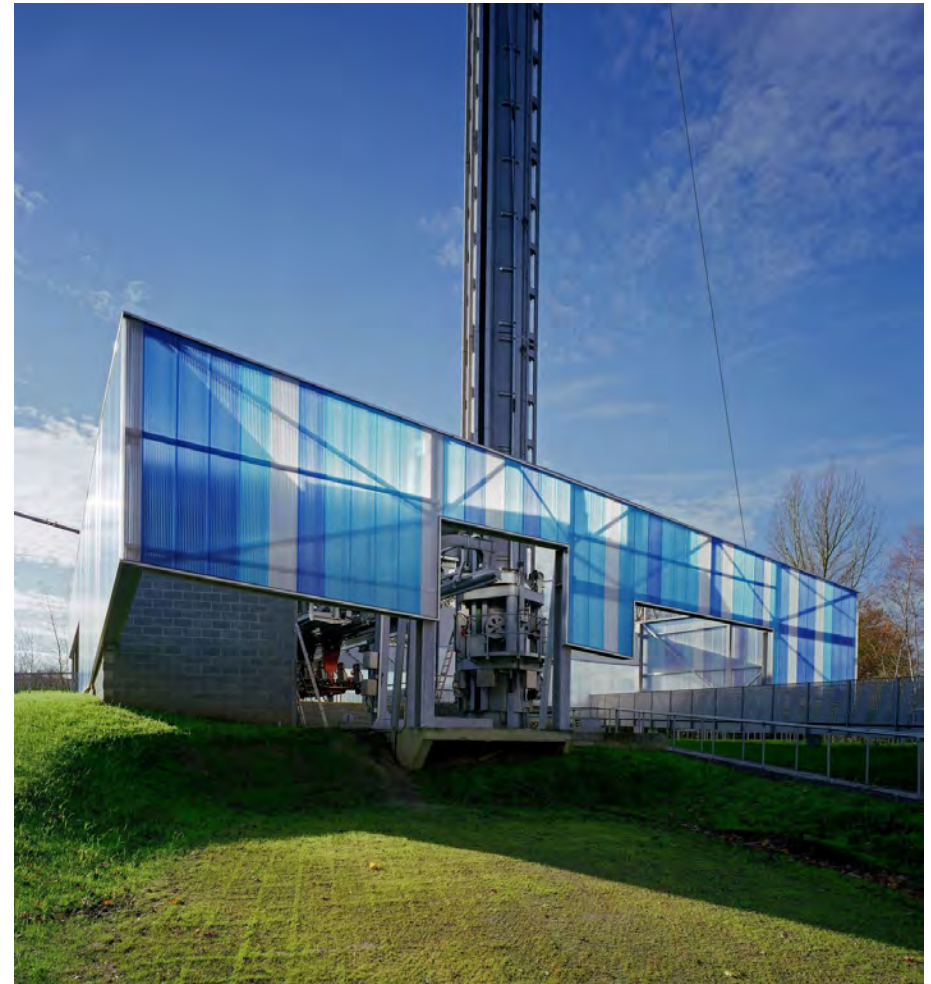
*practice as a deconstructed reality, and SMLXL as a mirror of the practice
This book might be a tentative of re-assembling, in search of coherence
In both cases, the lack of cement between bricks as a fundamental condition*

“AgwA was founded in 2003, two years after the partner's graduation. This is particularly meaningful, because it means that the partners did not undergo a strong training period at a Master's office. We found ourselves almost immediately projected in the arbitrary* realm of a deconstructed field**, with no Master to follow, but instead, a vast amount of masters to look at. As a consequence, through our projects, we are in a process of definition of an attitude in the field of architectural practice.”

** arbitrary : the apparently infinite expansion conceptual and constructive possibilities suggest that everything is possible, and consequently equivalent. Choice is subjected to arbitrariness.*

*** deconstructed : Louis Etienne Boullée broke the classical Vitruvian Trilogy. Styles and approaches multiplied exponentially. Even the profession is fragmented through the growing importance of engineers, designers and consultants of all kinds.*

“Four study cases on skins and structures”, Harold Fallon, ICSA, Universidade do Minho, Guimaraes, 2010



Vertigo, AgwA, 2007 - © M.-F. Plissart

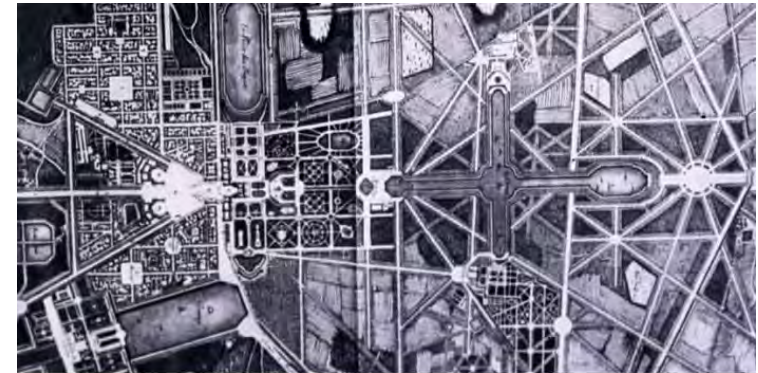
Architecture in a theme park: an almost normal context.

“This architectural sense producer combines words and images randomly into new meaningful (or meaningless) “sentences”. The induced illustration-legend effect is double : the image is read through the filter of its legend, and the text is put into perspective through the illustration. The “sensemaking” effect is partially illusive, as the “collection” of nouns, adjectives and images has undergone a preliminary selection process. Are novelty, creativity and meaning possible beyond the mere rearrangement of existing ideas into new combinations ? ”*

* “metarbitrariness?” is a search for an answer to this question, or at least, no to be petrified by it.

“sensemaker 1”, Harold Fallon, <http://www.agwa.be/sensemaker> (2007)

The sensemakers are javascript internet application I coded in 2007



polymorphic distortion



corrosive innocence



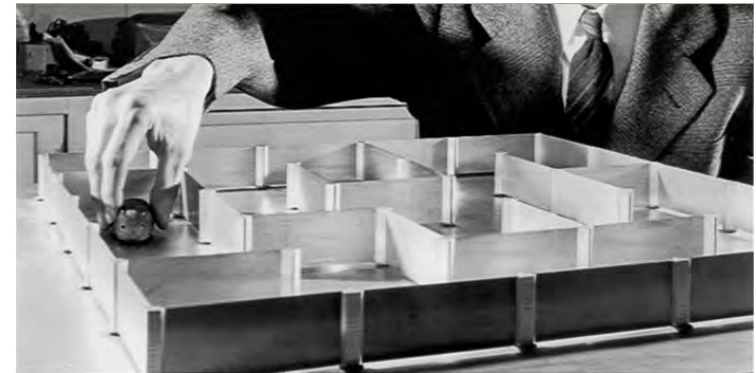
revolutionary one liner

“Linking apparently unrelated elements into a new coherent whole is probably a designerly way of thinking. We do it every day. Large sets of constraints (administration, site, norms, budget...) and ambitions (client, architects, society...) get interrelated in new artifacts and buildings, which synthesize possible new meanings. Some time ago, I playfully developed some internet applications I called “sensemakers”. They proposed random combinations of (chosen) terms inside a designed, coherent structure.

(...)

It is often heard that pure creation does not exist, and that it all emerges from new, unexpected combinations of pre-existing things. I don’t know if this should be considered as true, but at least, a kind of “combinatorial writing” (and the structuring thereof) is explicitly present in my field of interest.”

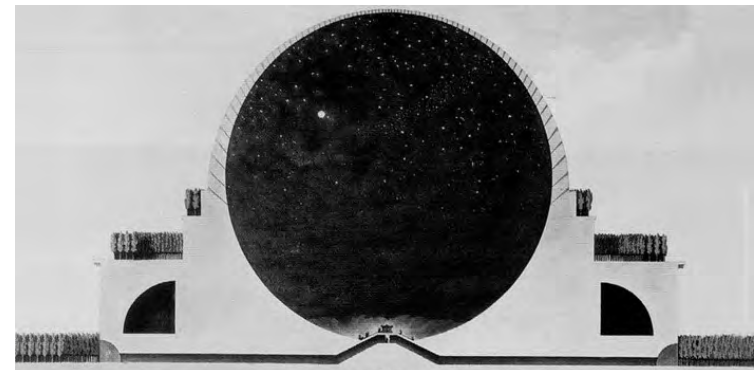
*“Shifting practice: Metal, Zumthor, the Baroque, Deleuze, Foucault”, H. Fallon
ICAUD, Epoka University, 2012*



polycentric piece of cake



absolute paradox



polemic paradox

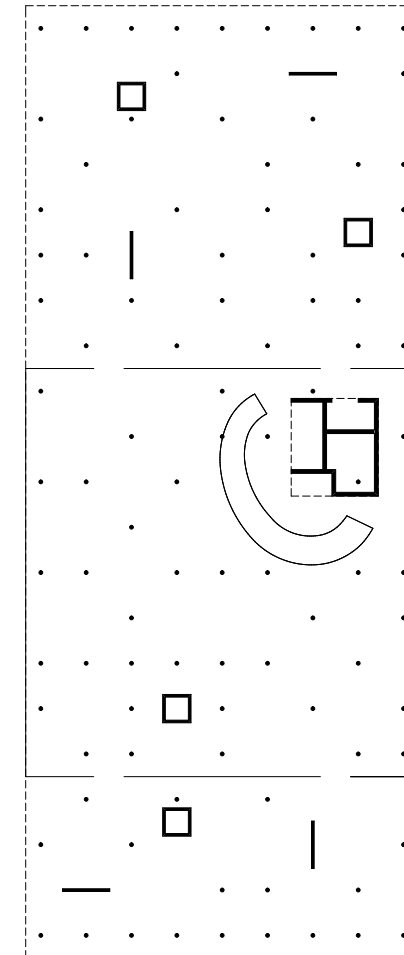
“Arbitrariness and randomness seem to have become a general condition in the contemporary society. As architects, how can we react to the multiplication of styles, approaches, and formalisms? Cultural identities have vanished in a thinned “globalized culture” or got sprawled in aggressive ultralocal regionalisms. There is a process ongoing of expanding of the possibilities, and at the same time, of vanishing of their consistencies. “The seeming failure of the urban offers an exceptional opportunity, a pretext for Nietzschean frivolity (...) The certainty of failure has to be our laughing gas/oxygen”(1). Indeed, after decades of this Koolhaasian subversion, what makes today a high-tech bling-bling approach more or less valuable than a socio-participationist one?

We are trapped by this situation. On the one hand, we can choose some style, adhere to it, adapt it, repeat it. But what is the relevance of applying a recipe? On the other hand, we can search for another, unexisting style or approach. But then, it will only become another possibility, an insignificant increment of the big global catalogue. One way out : not to choose, nor to invent formal approaches. In order to escape, or to transcend the arbitrariness of form, we need to reduce formal choices to their minimum. If possible, avoid form. Out of the formal chaos of the world, we need to (re-?)open a space for pragmatism and necessity.”

(1) Koolhaas, R., 1995, 'S, M, L, XL', 010 Publishers, Rotterdam, p 969

“Squares”, H. Fallon & B. Vandenbulcke, 2009, *Communicating (by) Design*, Sint Lucas, Brussels

This paper explored the use of the square shape in our projects.



0 2 4m

Koga Park Cafe, Sanaa, 1998 - plan analyse by B. Vandenbulcke

A spatial diagram is translated directly into architecture, avoiding material or formal perturbations.

“1° J'ai reconnu l'impossibilité de m'exprimer ;
 2° Je me suis rabattu sur la tentative de description des choses (mais aussitôt, j'ai voulu les transcender!) ;
 3° J'ai reconnu (récemment) l'impossibilité non seulement d'exprimer mais de décrire les choses.
 Ma démarche en est à ce point. Je puis donc soit décider de me taire, mais cela ne me convient pas : l'on ne se résout pas à l'abrutissement. Soit décider de publier des descriptions ou des relations d'échecs de description”

1° I recognized the impossibility of expression;
 2° I fell back on the attempt to describe things (but soon, I wanted to transcend them!)
 3° I recognized (recently) the inability not only to express but to describe things.
 My approach is at this point. So I can either decide to remain silent, but that does not suit me: one can not accept brutishness. Either I can decide to publish descriptions or relations of failures of descriptions”

“Le parti pris des choses”, Francis Ponge, p181, Gallimard, 1941

*Francis Ponge is a french prose-poet I used to read a lot during the period 2000-2010.
 The influence of his writings on my practice agenda is undeniable, he's a muse.*



*Lacaton & Vassal, Latapie House in Floirac, 1993
 source : <http://www.lacatonvassal.com>*

Make sense out of almost nothing: imperfect, cheap, available materials in simple, concise, functional shapes.

“The avant-gardist experimentations of the XXth century “deconstructed” occidental architecture and architecture practises.

cfr Renato Poggioli The Theory of the Avant-Garde, 1962

cfr Jacques Derrida. Deconstructions implies the impossibility of a univoque significance of texts .

Consider architecture as a language, and architecture projects as texts

This process led to attempts of grasping back to history through citational or ironical principles, and/or by seeking ambiguity and paradoxical situations. This could be called postmodernism, if we need to name it.

cfr R. Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, 1966

The result is a realm of relativism, fuzziness and arbitrariness.

This in return, could be considered “the postmodern condition”, of which Koolhaas has been a main architectural practitioner and theorist, with claims such as “The certainty of failure has to be our laughing gas/oxygen”

In this balkanized situation, I wonder if architects do lose their historical responsibility, beyond pragmatical problem-solving, aesthetic freedom and the obligation of sustainability ? In other words, has architectural history reached its end ? Or on the contrary, is it possible to renew the idea of relevance in regard of architecture history ? How can architects make sense today ?

cfr Weick, Dervin, Klein, etc. Sensemaking refers to the process of creating situational awareness and understanding in situations of high complexity or uncertainty in order to make decisions.“

*extract from “keeping track”, a tentative for a plan of the research, 09/06/2011
Today, a tentative of placement of the artistic/ethical dilemma of arbitrariness in respect of a postmodern culture.*



On one side there is a cow-boy (the Ugly), digging a tomb in the dry desert sand. On the other side, another cow-boy (the Good) is giving orders while threatening him with a gun. This manichean scene is symptomatic of a preconceived dualism between body and mind, materiality and spirituality. A quintessential representation of the unquestioned supremacy of Verb upon Matter.

But all I can feel, perceive and explore, is material in itself, in its causes or in its consequences. In the scene, the Verb without the Gun would be harmless. Isn't it time to consider that consciousness and materiality need to be intrinsically bound in order to achieve full operability and relevance?

Brussels, 01/10/2008

*“In this world there's two kinds of people, my friend.
Those with loaded guns, and those who dig. You dig.”*

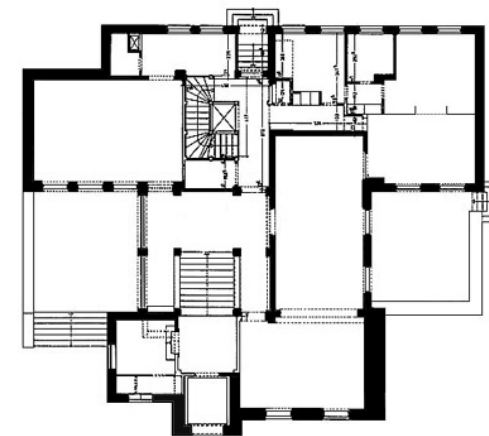
Clint Eastwood in “The good, the bad and the ugly” (1966)

“This second architectural sense producer combines the plan of Wittgenstein's house with sentences about the intrication of meaning, interpretation and randomness. Is meaning possible beyond the mere coexistence of things ? Or inversely, can this mere coexistence become significant itself? Is it all about interpretation of their relations (the structure)? Or about the very debate they generate?”

Wittgenstein's house plan can be interpreted as a random arrangement of unitary rooms, as opposite to a plan which functional infill would match a global structure conferring coherence to the whole.

Similarly, the sentences are created through the random juxtaposition of words. Of course, the structure of the sentence is predefined and invariable, but in the same way, the rooms of Wittgenstein's house are precisely articulated.

Some sentences seem to be true, other false, and some seem not to make sense at all. In each case, they provoke a reaction regarding their meaning. Is it also Wittgenstein's house's hidden agenda ?”

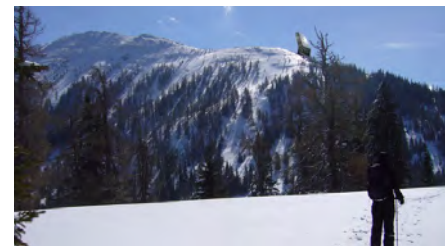


*House for Margarethe Stonborough-Wittgenstein
Ludwig Wittgenstein, Paul Engelmann (1926-1928)*

multiplicity is the sense of conscience.
 juxtaposition is the structure of sense.
 sense is the contingency of interpretation.
 structure is the interpretation of organization.
 coherence is the knowledge of cohesion.
 randomness is the essence of analogy.
 meaning is the communication of juxtaposition.
 coherence is the organization of conscience.
 essence is the organization of cohesion.
 knowledge is the essence of analogy.

“sensemaker 2”, Harold Fallon, <http://www.agwa.be/sensemaker2> (2007)

“A small model of a tower is playfully but seamlessly photoshopped in a wide range of very different contexts. Is architecture still a local issue? Is everything possible everywhere? What is our role as architects? Are we, architects, doomed to irrelevance and relativity?”



*“crooked discursive paths”, Harold Fallon, 2011, Archtheo, Istanbul
Touring Lanaken*

These images were published on the splash screen www.agwa.be between 2008 and 2010, without explication. We do not know how these images were interpreted by visitors.

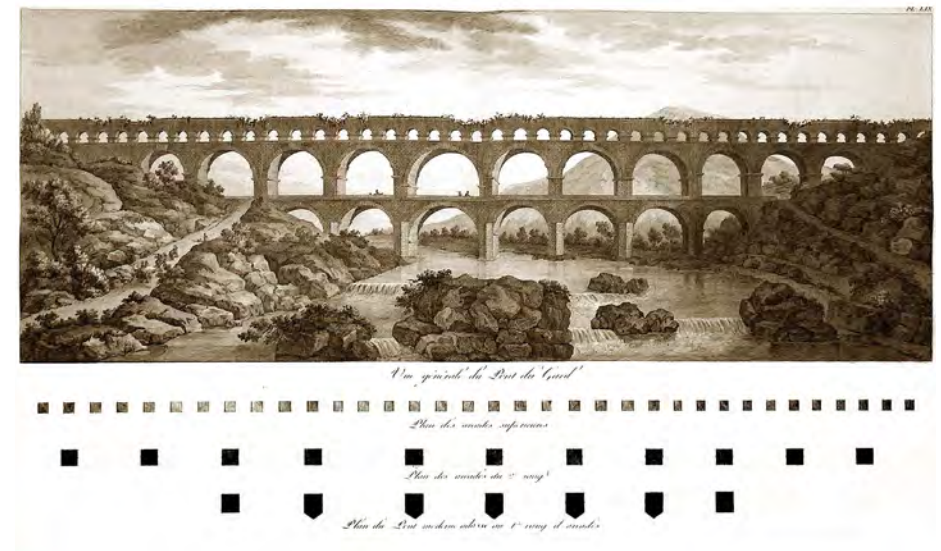
2. Ambitions for an attitude in a deconstructed field

Arranged fragments, 2003-2013

“Oui, ce sont des monuments utilitaires, comme le Pont du Gard”

Indeed, they are utilitarian monuments, like the Pont du Gard
(Ponge about Malherbe’s poems, and also his own).

“pour un Malherbe”, Ponge, 1965, NRF, p125



Pont du Gard, around 75 AD, print by Clérissseau, 1804

A coincidence of utility and elegance.

2a. Metarbitrariness?

«Remettre en question notre volonté de vérité; Restituer au discours son caractère d'événement; Lever enfin la souveraineté du signifiant.»

Question our will to obtain truth; Devolve to discourse its nature of event; Finally make an end to the sovereignty of significance.”

“L'ordre du discours”, Michel Foucault, p 53, Gallimard, 1971



Walking a line in Peru, Richard Long, 1972

Unpredictable, meaningless (or at least non-discursive), yet evident.

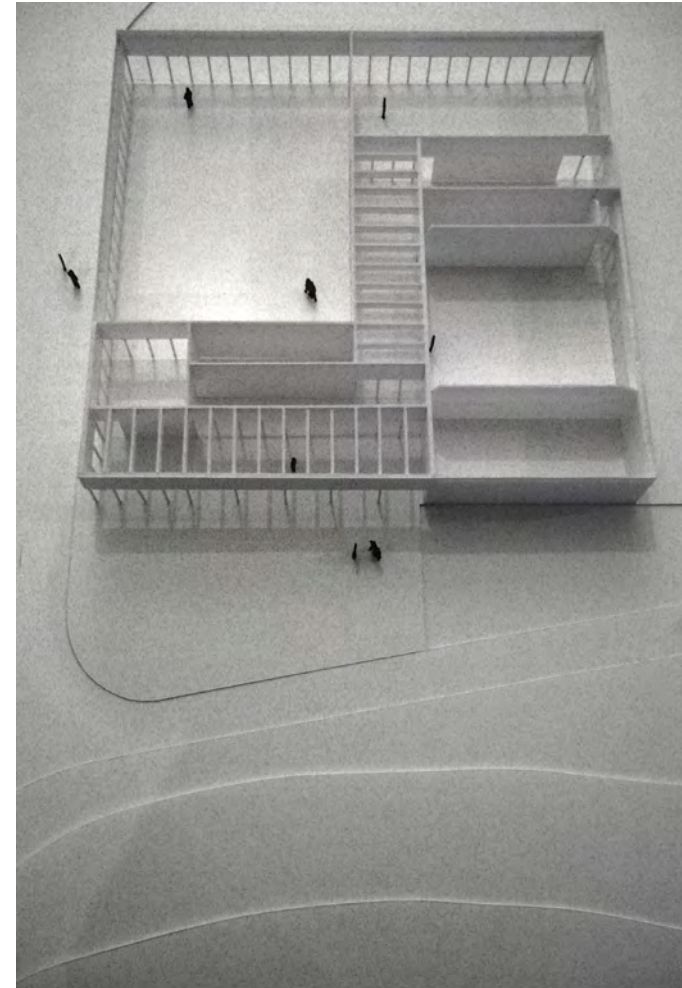
“The idea that the world is intrinsically undetermined and that predictability has limits, that locality and temporality have specific interactions with reality, that novelty can emerge from existing systems, and so on, are so fundamental in the description of reality, that it seems inevitable to take it into account when producing artifacts that will participate to reality (which architectural designs are).

Of course, the possibility of free will (arbitrariness?) and the lack of inherent significance in things could be a cause of absolute equivalence in production : what makes an ultra-kitsch approach more or less valuable than a socio-participationist one?

What we aim in our work is not an hypothetical new universal design method. It is rather an attempt to understand “how the world operates” and to make use of this (and perhaps only this) in an architectural practice, thus overcoming the problem of arbitrariness. Quite a challenge !”

“On Communication”, Harold Fallon, 2008, Sint Lucas, Brussels, unpublished

*This text was produced for a Research Training session.
It was an answer the assignment “How does the world operate and how can know it?”*



Philippeville, model with no roofs, AgwA, 2008

an almost irrational logicity?

“When speaking of the internal processes of the making of architecture, architects handle something that is not problematic, not necessary, that hasn't failed, and that is not paradoxical in itself. This aspect of their activity is fundamental and unavoidable but essentially superfluous.

They stand in a schizophrenic situation in which what they do is necessarily unnecessary because it certainly has already “been done” in some way, and if not, when done, it becomes equivalent to any other solution.

Simultaneously, designers can only exist through the confrontation with this impossibility of significance and judgment. This does certainly not happen through resignation and acceptance. As Albert Camus says : "Revolt is the only coherent philosophical position. It is the permanent confrontation of mankind with its own obscurity. It is the requirement of an impossible transparency."

And Ponge : “Anyway, failure is never absolute”

Harold Fallon, “Kortlezer By Design For Design”, in Reflections 9, p 106, 2008



Lightning field, Walter De Maria, 1977

the geometrical arrangement of the metallic poles is a fundamental, yet functionally superfluous feature of the work

“I stood still at Foucault’s proposition at the end of his book “The Order of Things”, which he does not develop: what could the possible “disappearance” of man mean in the history of thought? The question can be transferred to creative practices and more specifically to architecture. Is an architecture possible in which the architect retracts from his creative omnipotence and centrality? How could this happen? Instead of the provocative assertion of man about to disappear from its central position in the understanding (and making) of the world, I would propose that man could be repositioned: it's position can be redefined.”



« A square ‘neutral, shapeless’ canvas, five feet wide, five feet high, as high as a man, as wide as a man’s outstretched arms ‘not large, not small, sizeless’, trisected ‘no composition’, one horizontal form negating one vertical form ‘formless, no top, no bottom, directionless’, three ‘more or less’ dark ‘lightless’ no-contrasting ‘colourless’ colours, brushwork brushed out to remove brushwork, a matte, flat, freedhand painted surface ‘glossless, textureless, non-linear, no hard edge, no soft edge’ which does not reflect its surroundings — a pure, abstract, non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless relationless, disinterested painting — an object that is self-conscious ‘no unconsciousness’ ideal, transcendent, aware of no thing but art ‘absolutely no anti-art’.»

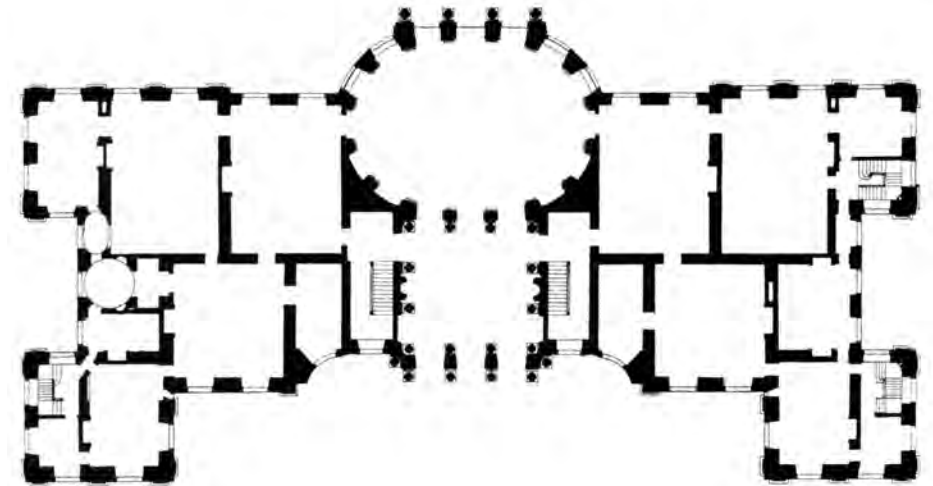
“Shifting practice: Metal, Zumthor, the Baroque, Deleuze, Foucault”, H. Fallon
ICAUD, Epoka University, 2012

“Autocritique de Reinhardt”, Ad Reinhardt, 1963,
reprinted as *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, New York: Viking Press, 1975, pp.82-3.

“C’est la beauté mathématique plus la matière des choses, éprouvée par la sensibilité et amenée à la raison.”

It is the mathematical beauty, to which the matter of things is added, challenged by sensibility and brought to reason.

“pour un Malherbe”, Ponge, 1965, NRF, p25



0 5 10m

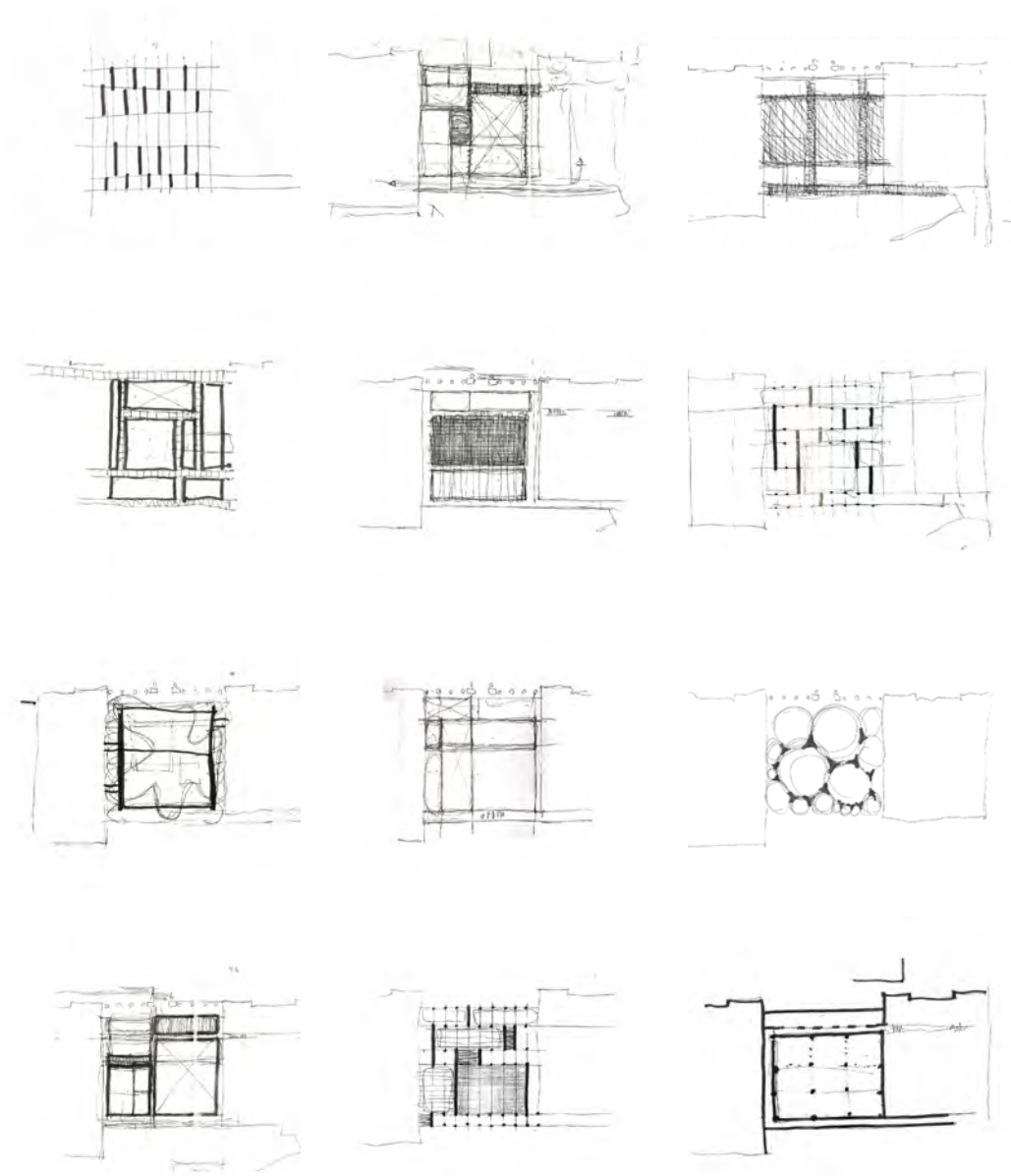
Plan of Vau-le-Vicomte, Louis Le Vau, 1661

2b. The practice is the discourse (and vice-versa)

“Quelle idée, de demander à un poète ce qu’il a voulu dire ? Et n’est-il pas évident que s’il est seul à ne pouvoir l’expliquer, c’est parce qu’il ne peut le dire autrement qu’il ne l’a dit (sinon sans doute l’aurait-il dit d’une autre façon) ?”

It is a strange idea, to ask to a poet what he meant? Isn’t it evident, that if he is the only one who cannot explain it, it is because he can’t say it in another way than he did (otherwise he would probably have expressed it in this other way)?

“Méthodes”, Francis Ponge, Gallimard, 1961



BPS22 contemporary arts platform - sketches, AgwA+Matador, 2008

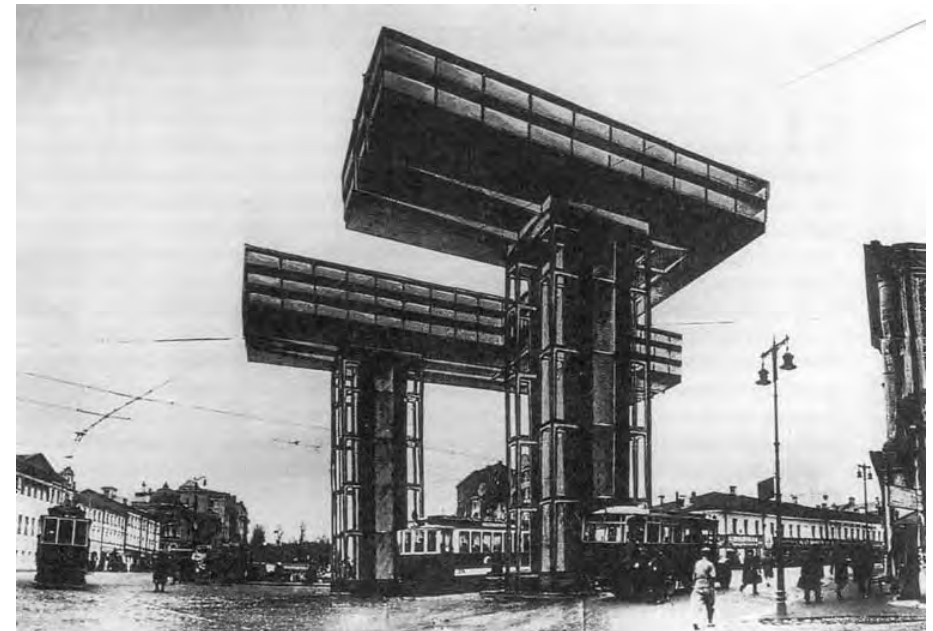
«The first stages of this research were very loaded with philosophy. I wanted to grasp explicitly these issues of essentialism and existentialism, of ontology, and so on. I think it is still there, but I do not talk about it anymore. A novel is a simple story about people and events. But at the same time, it can be very loaded with content situated on a meta level. Like Dostovievski. I'm aware a PhD is not a novel, but I'm interested by this simultaneous action on different levels.

Ponge is a poet I used to read a lot. He used to write about specific things, or objects, like the rain or the figue. He wrote a book which is entitled «The Soap». Not «a» soap or «this» soap, but «the» soap, as something at the same time general and specific. His «Soap» is a recollection of fragments of textual studies over a large span of time, which are glued together with comments and new texts. While doing this, he is simply writing about the soap, trying to express as precisely as possible what the soap is. He says his task is utilitarian : he wants his texts to become like items of the dictionary, but better, more exhaustive, more precise, more general. Simultaneously, he manages to convert the whole text into a soap : the text behaves like the soap, it is expressive and baroque like soap bubbles, circumvoluting like dissolving soap, ungraspable like a wet soap, and drying out like a stone in the end. And last, he uses the soap as a metaphor of literature. His «Soap» becomes a programmatic text on literature, what literature is, and should be. While making poetry, and only poetry, he is also engaging with literature and philosophy. He is a philosopher who hides his nature.

I am very interested in this idea of multiple agendas. I think what I'm looking for is something of this nature : to stick to projects, being aware that they are at the same time a discourse on the making of architecture today. I believe there is a strong issue with architecture today : it is the arbitrariness, you can do everything, every form, every material, everything is possible... And we try to overcome this problem by sticking to the projects, to constructive aspects, to «what architects do». Not to superimpose a discourse on architecture is also situated on a metaphysical level.»

*“Graduate Research Conference”, Harold Fallon, 2011, RMIT & Sint Lucas, Ghent,
transcribed and rewritten 2012*

*Reaction to a comment of Adam Adam Jakimowicz
about the “fascinating anti-metaphysical approach of the research”*



Wolkenbuegel, Lazar Lissitzky, 1925

A layered reality : building, image, politics, theory.

2c. Stepping back, Straightness, Precision

“Recently, I made a time-line of the projects of the office and added architecture and literary references that accompanied the last years. I also extracted the operational concepts that were discovered through these projects. The result was an operational dictionary collecting the recurrent themes of the office.

I noted that the themes before the Metal project are specifically about the framing of creative input and affirmative decisionmaking in the design process. It is about “formulating hypotheses” or “defining constructive strategies”.

After Metal, I noticed that most themes are about some limitation of creative arbitrariness, about stepping back from a Nietzschean notion of creativity. It is about “the right opportunity”, about “perfection” in the sense of completeness, about “stepping back”, or about “irreducibility” of a constructive solution.”

“Shifting practice: Metal, Zumthor, the Baroque, Deleuze, Foucault”, H. Fallon, ICAUD, Epoka, 2012

The discovery of this shift in the practice is explicated later in the book. With this fragment, I want to stress the “limitation of creative arbitrariness” as an ambition at the time of the shift. Now, I realize this is not really a limitation, but rather a displacement of the application of creative input in the design process.



Fort VI, elevation, Agwá, 2010

vocabulary reduction

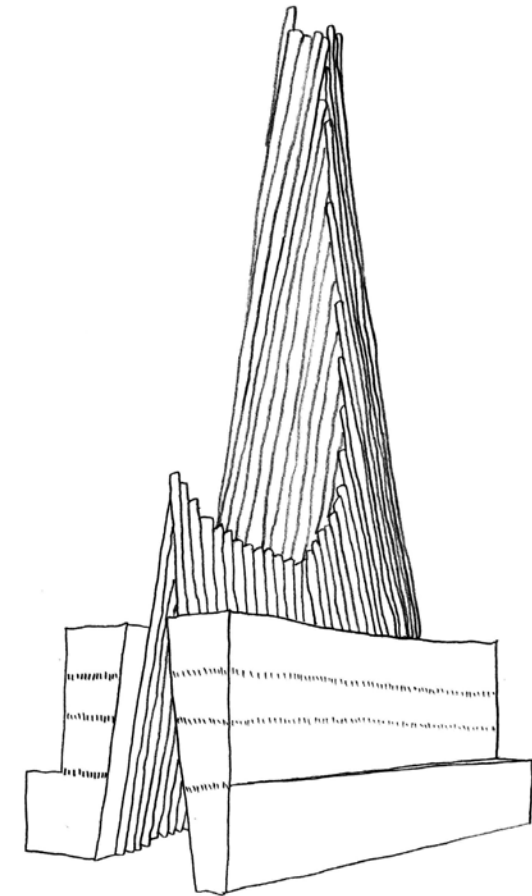
A propos de Malherbe :

“Il faut snober les snobs eux-mêmes. Il faut périodiquement désaffubler la poésie. Ses plus grandes éloges, il les donne de sang-froid. Il sait exactement les doser, et ne dire que ce qu'il veut dire. Il sait ce qu'il fait. Dire, pour lui, c'est faire. Il sait ce qu'il veut faire, et voit clairement ce qu'il fait. Il corrige alors ce qu'il dit par ce qu'il veut dire. Il sait où il veut frapper, et il frappe juste. Sans souci de la vérité pure : efficacité, beauté.”

About Malherbe :

The snobs themselves should be snubbed. We must periodically un-deck poetry out. His highest praises, he writes them in cold blood. He knows exactly how to dose them, and to say only what he means. He knows what he does. To say, for him is to do. He knows what he wants to do and sees clearly what he does. He then corrects what he says by what he means. He knows where he wants to hit, and hits right. Without concern for pure truth: efficiency, beauty.

“Pour un Malherbe”, Ponge, p59, NRF, 1965



Bruder Klaus Chapel, P. Zumthor, 2007

Premeditation and straightness of architecture in the making

“On the side of materiality, it must be noted that Zumthor originates from the baukunst tradition of very talented craftsmen. His projects are always fed by what he calls “the anatomy” of the building. These are very controlled constructive seeds that allow the building to emerge in the shape of an irreducible, independent monolith that is not physically articulated to the context. His control upon the building is absolute: as well the constructive details as the spatial aspects are “closed” to external influences or contradictions, which transforms the buildings into autonomous, eternal structures.

(...)

The Metal project could be understood as representative of this free creative interpretation of a monadistic structural principle. The difference with Zumthor lies in the quite loose and open constructive interpretation, contrasting with the very tight and closed control of Zumthor’s details. In this interpretation, the structure is brought to reality in very different shapes, following the creative decisions of the architect, which relate to interpretations of the context.

Contrary to Zumthor, AgwA considers that contradictions, dissonances and openness to influences are not alienating. Metal’s spatiality is completely open and absorbs the context (the existing situation, the neighbouring city, the possible appropriation of space etc.).”



“Shifting practice: Metal, Zumthor, the Baroque, Deleuze, Foucault”, H. Fallon ICAUD, Epoka U., 2012

refer to p 160 about Benoît analysis of Zumthor’s control methods, and comparatively, p 124 about the loosely controlled structural strategies by AgwA. Refer to book II for an analysis of the Metal project.

AgwA, Metal, 2009 - © M.-F. Plissart

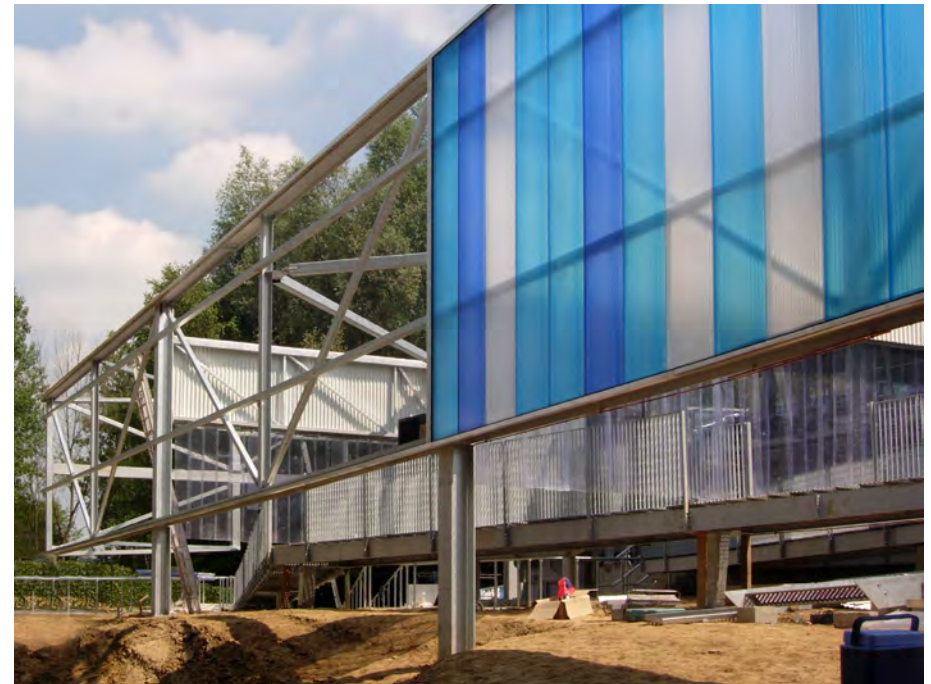
Loose control of precise principles

“In the end, it could all be about
the formulation of hypotheses
which are
specific enough
and generic enough

to provide a strong identity
to resolve any degree of complexity
to respond to local and global constraints and potentials.

These hypotheses can address different issues
like spatiality, program, structure or materiality

Once formulated precisely
(after an explorative process of variable length)
there is a point in which these hypotheses
can simply be applied or built.”



GRC EUR nov 2010, Harold Fallon, RMIT & Sint Lucas, Ghent, transcribed and rewritten 2012

*This may be considered as an attempt to formulate an absolute meta-level covering the entire practice.
Now, I consider this more as a general ambition : seeking a balance between flexibility and specificity,
spatiality and constructive reality.*

Vertigo - work site photograph, AgwA, 2007 - © AgwA

3. Charting the practice

Between 2003 and 2012, the practice and the understanding thereof evolved significantly. The practice challenged itself continuously. Where should I start? With the operational concepts at work in the projects? With a sketch of the global frameworks of understanding of the practice? With simple, neutral explication of the projects? With the explication of key moments and documents, which shifted the practice? With the exploration of the community of practice?

To follow one unique path through the practice and its evolution, starting in one point, and ending in another point, seems to be an almost impossible task, as I pointed in the fragment about Ponge and the multiple agenda's of practice. There is not one unique narrative, one linear pursuit, but a field of overlapping concerns. Instead, there is a interwoven multiplicity of stories covering the practice, its reality, its ambitions, its interpretation, its evolution, its relationships to a community of practice.

We would need a chart allowing the reader to travel through the practice following these multiple tracks, and perhaps to discover new ones. The chart could work like a flexible, non-linear table of contents, that can be navigated following different tracks.

Referring to the ambition of the practice itself, it would be a chart overcoming the arbitrariness of telling one narrative while hiding other ones.



*"Other maps are such shapes, with their islands and capes!
But we've got our brave Captain to thank
(So the crew would protest) that he's brought us the best--
A perfect and absolute blank!"*

Bellman's Chart in "The Hunting of the Snark", Lewis Carroll, 1876
source : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hunting_of_the_Snark

Gerhard Richter's Atlas is a mere chronological juxtaposition of photographs, drawings and diagrams he has compiled or created over 40 years. They are a continuous flow of images and references that fed the artist. It is an infinite work in progress. Archeological in form, it simply has the ambition to exist, to show what is there. There is no ambition to support any kind of discourse, except its existence as a possibly coherent universe.



Atlas, G. Richter, p 6 & 8, 1962
source <http://www.gerhard-richter.com>

Art historian Aby Warburg organized his library not alphabetically nor by subject. His books were grouped by 'elective affinities', a subjective feeling of coherence. In the last years of his life, he developed a project called "Mnemosyne Atlas" which aimed to make visible relationships between Renaissance art and the productions from the following centuries. These collections of images, pinned on black panels, were constantly rearranged and modified. It became an universe in perpetual transformation.

However, this continuous modification was probably not perceived as an inherent feature. He was probably looking for a perfect, definitive arrangement, but each time a configuration was actualized, it was contradictory to other even meaningful arrangements, and consequently could not fit as a conclusive panel or even tend towards stabilization.

Could he have imagined a way of displaying the images and documents in order to make various specific narratives explicit at the same time, avoiding the issue of partiality of each narrative?



Der Bilderatlas MNEMOSYNE, panel 79, Aby Warburg, 1925-1929

In “A Beautiful Mind”, mathematician John Nash works to discover and extract hidden patterns and narratives out of almost infinite sets of documents.

Dr. Rosen: You can’t reason your way out of this!

Nash: Why not? Why can’t I?

Dr. Rosen: Because your mind is where the problem is in the first place!

There is no point to search obsessively for one impossible hidden truth, when reality is a complex weaving of intermingled and (un)contradictory narratives. There is no need to look for an exhaustively global equation. Instead, we can organize the coexistence of things in order to make the multiplicity of local coherences visible.



A Beautiful Mind, Ron Howard, 2002

screenshots

“Different praxemes (1) were discovered inside the practice (AgwA) : metaphorical specificity, generic systems, material language, contextual autonomy, and the flexible identification of structure and architecture.

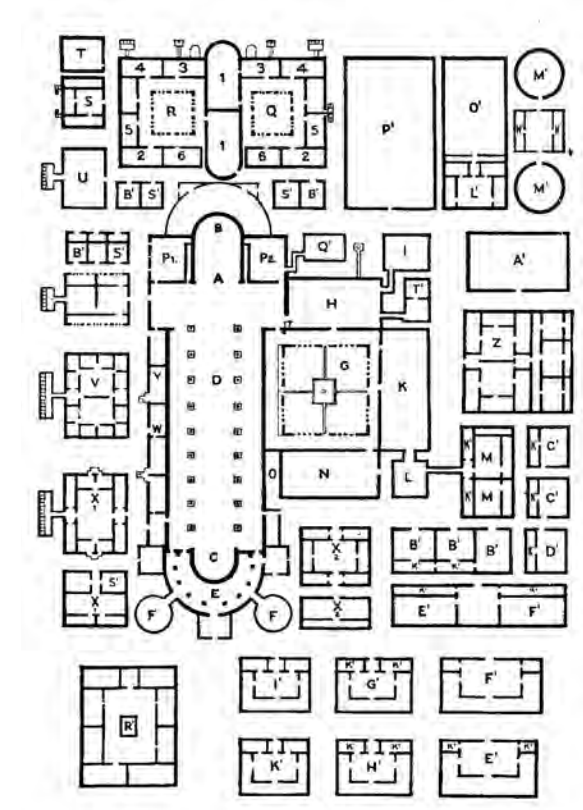
The interpretation of the relationships between these themes went through successive phases: heterogeneity model, dual model, open additive layering, and retroactive layering.

These themes are all located inside the practice of architecture. This way of doing has some affinities with the work of french poet Francis Ponge, whose texts, while sticking strictly to their objects, contain implicit literary and metaphysical agendas.

The research ends with an exhibition, which is conceived as a navigation chart of the practice, that supports simultaneously different narratives: the discovery of the key moments of transformation of the practice, the analysis of the working of the themes, the changing interpretation of the meaning of the relationships between themes, the neutral documentation of the projects, the context of community of practice, etc.”

(1) I do not remember where I was confronted with the locution “Praxeme”. It is a contraction of “praxis” (action) and “semeion” (sense, meaning). i use it to refer to a piece of knowledge that can not be considered independently from the practice. It is distilled from the practice and informs the practice.

research report, june 2012



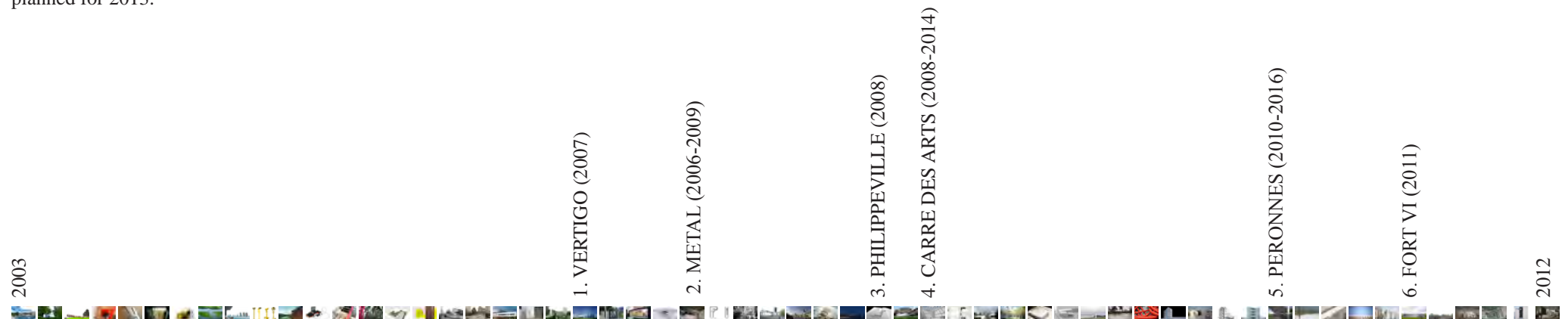
reproduction of the Sankt Gall Abbey plan, ca 820 AD

multiplicity of spaces and trajectories through the simplicity of the arrangement.

The navigation chart is based on 6 key projects from the period running from 2003 to 2012. These projects were not “chosen” a priori, but appeared as the research went on, as they corresponded to the recognition of methods, issues, praxemes and fundamental shifts in the practice of the office. Retrospectively, they also are important projects for the development of the office, through their scale, clients and programs.

So, the chart embodies the metanarrative of the PhD. It explicits the layering of concerns of the practice and the practice itself simultaneously. Also, the way the chart is structured is an application of the praxemes of the practice, and it attempts to avoid the issue of arbitrariness in the narrative.

Philippeville and Fort VI are lost competitions. The Vertigo was already built when the research began, and Metal was nearing completion. The Carré des Arts was won by the start of the research and is an ongoing project. In 2012, due to budgetary restriction, the typology of the project is completely changed and we are currently re-developing an alternative project for the same place. Péronnes was won in 2010 and has been developed during the course of the research. The start of the works is planned for 2013.



1. VERTIGO

Theming of a new ride, Walibi Belgium theme park

Client	Walibi Belgium
Budget	520.000,00 euros excl VAT
Year	2007, invited competition, winner
Team	AgwA (architecture, landscape) Greisch (structure)
Surface	construction ± 400m ² landscape ± 6000 m ²
Status	completed

“While the European cities are gradually getting shaped like theme parks through historicist decorations, politically correct facadism and passeist regulations, what specificity has been left over to theme parks? Perhaps they could respond to this situation by proposing contemporary spaces instead of heterochronic projections? Structural and spontaneous spots instead of artificial and decorative ornaments? Indeed, theme parks are in essence heterotopic places out of space and time. Now that cities project themselves in so-called better times, and while housing gets sprawled in pseudo rural styles, may theme parks become the last places of concrete reality?

Some kind of reality blues?

We thought this frightening perspective might be worth a try, and we proposed not to dissociate the theme from the attraction itself, in an effort to show it «as-is». The attraction should be revealed in its nudity, instead of being packed in an outdated decoration. Its technology and engineering should be exhibited and not camouflaged. Reality without shame. What we actually designed is no theme at all. The main idea is to enclose the attraction's station and queueline in a light and industrial translucent skin, revealing the technicality of the attraction while preserving some mystery and untold presence. The visitor is teased by this unusual object and by this game of troubled perception.”



Vertigo, AgwA, extract from the portfolio

2. METAL

Refurbishment of a tire workshop in evening school, sports hall and housing

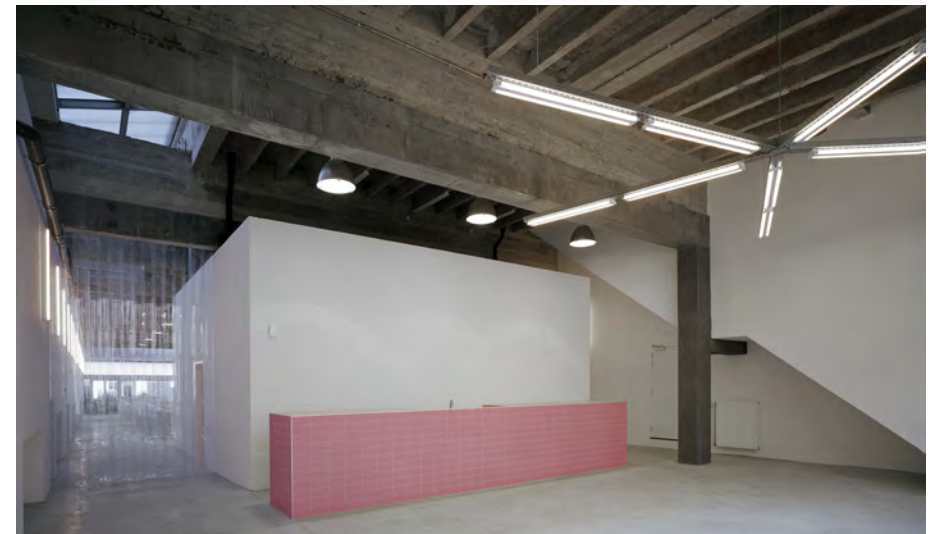
Client	Saint-Gilles commune, Brussels
Budget	1 527 730.90,00 € incl VAT
Year	restricted competition, winner
Team	AgwA + Ferrière Architectes (architecture) JZH & partners (structure)
Surface	construction 1606 m2
Status	completed 2009

«The building, which has preserved the qualities of space and light of the period of its construction, now houses a sports hall, an after-school homework programme, and three moderate-rent apartments. This mixed development meets the requirements set out in the «neighbourhood agreement» urban-regeneration project of the district.

We decided to preserve as much as possible of the powerful modernist architectural structure. The two apartments are conceived as a totally independent structure hanging over the roof. As the existing apartment is already conceived as a bridge-structure, the new ensemble induces a horizontal stratification of heterogeneous parts contrasting strongly with the surrounding houses.

In order to reinforce this contrast, and also to match sharp financial criteria, the facade cladding of the new apartments is realized in transparent polycarbonate, that is also used in the large glass roofs and façades.

The project focuses on structure and skin topics : archeological preservation, transformation, and resonance of new structural elements with the older ones. These structural strategies are all ruled by the understanding of the structural behavior, instead of the structural design. In consequence, a coherent diversity is made possible in appearances and materialities.»



Metal, AgwA, extract from the portfolio - © M.-F. Plissart

3. PHILIPPEVILLE

Masterplan for a school campus and school restaurant, Philippeville

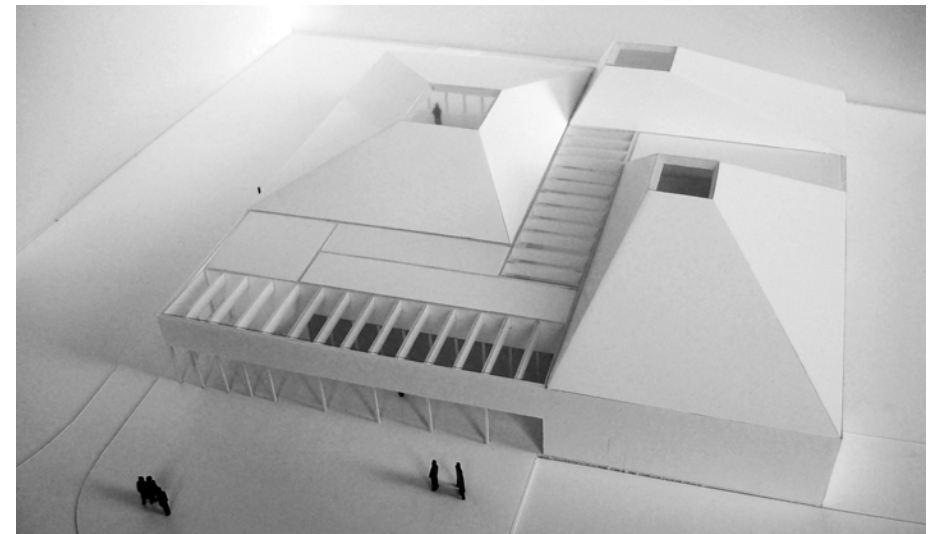
Client	CFWB (Ministry of the French Community of Belgium)
Budget	1.475.000,00 euros excluding VAT
Year	2008, invited competition
Team	AgwA + Artgineering (architecture, landscape) Ney & Partners (structure) Boydens (installations)
Surface	construction \pm 1000m ²
Status	2nd

“The new school restaurant and the reorganization of the whole campus imply the rethinking of its relationship to the city. The campus is part of a green “cut” inviting an extensive landscape to the heart of the town. This green landscape is flexible and blurs borders. It absorbs freely changes and transformations over time.

A «loop» forms the backbone of the campus’ transformational process. Better, this uniting landmark doesn’t imply heavy investments. In a borderless landscape from rural fields to urban centre, it allows the campus to evolve in a flexible way and ensures its spatial identification during the process.

The restaurant is located at the center of the campus. Indeed, the restaurant is a central place : both the heart of the campus’ life and regeneration. The building is conceived as an irreducible set of rooms with different sizes, heights, and uses.

The building is flexible and accessible : it is a place for all. An open, light wood structure fits the room’s dimensions. More and stronger spaces for less”



Philippeville, AgwA, extract from the portfolio

4. CARRE DES ARTS

Retractable covering of the Carré des Arts, Mons, Belgium

Client CFWB (Ministry of the French Community of Belgium)

Budget 3 000 000,00 € excl VAT

Year 2008, competition, winner

Team Association AgwA + Ney & partners

AgwA (architecture)

Ney & Partners (structure), dUCKS scéno (scenography),

Kahle acoustics (acoustics), Boydens (technics)

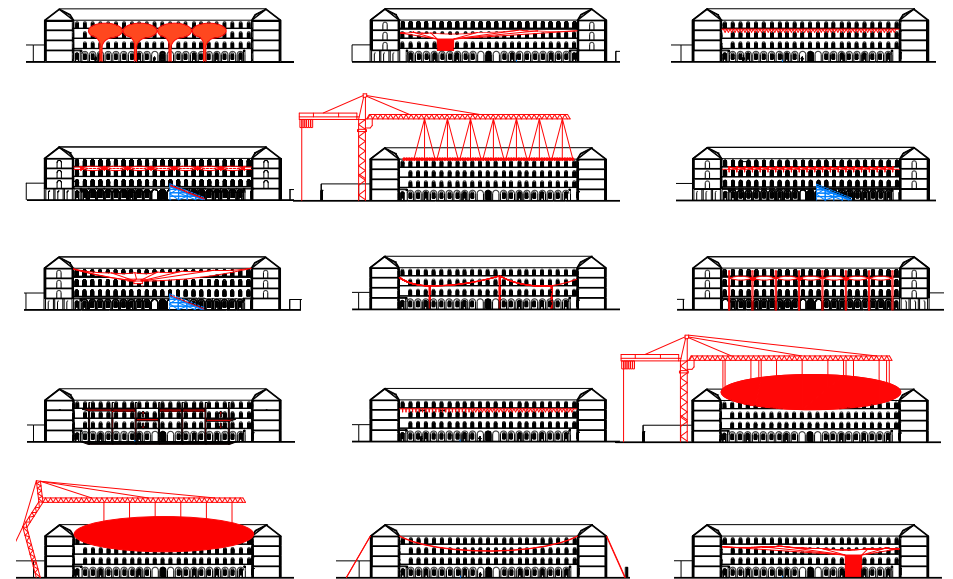
Status works planned 2014

«The covering of the Carré des Arts ins Mons is a project between roof and tent, is intrinsically technological, and seems to escape the traditional field of architecture. Consequently, the project is about the definition of an attitude towards these aspects. A common ground had to be found for structure, technique and spatiality.

1. manutention / The first option is an «unconstructed» structure. While the roof is merely textile and has to be rebuilt each time, the only permanent structure are anchoring points on the floor and the roof edges. The Carré des Arts becomes essentially potential, as any future possibility is opened through the chart of anchors.

2. articulated structure / In the second option, is a made-to-measure one. The articulation of the textile structure itself allows to cover partially or totally the square. Permanent rails on the facades guide the mechanisms that fold and unfold this accordion-like roof.

3. retractable roofs / The third option is the catalogue-based one. A network of slender beams chart the sky above the roofs themselves. The defined «tiles» receive prefabricated retractable roofs, which are fully ready-made and automatised. A wide range of uses is made possible from total covering to complete opening.»



*Carré des Arts, AgwA, extract from the portfolio
typological schemes from the feasibility study*

5. PERONNES

Development of a sports and sailing center at Peronnes, Belgium

Client	Communauté Française Wallonie Bruxelles
Budget	6.189.000,00 EUR excl VAT
Planning	2010, invited competition, 1st price
Team	association AgwA - Artgineering AgwA + Artgineering (architecture + landscape) Ney & Partners (structure) Boydens (technics)
Surface	construction ±5900m ² + 7.5 ha landscape
Status	works planned 2013-2015

«The strong presence of the water and the alluvial landscape of the Scheldt is highly determined by the fluvial infrastructure of the Nimy-Blaton waterway. A long pier is introduced, floating over this characteristic alluvial landscape and ecosystem. The pier is reminiscent of the linear human inscription in the landscape, and distributes all functions in a flexible way.

A sports hall is directly bound to the parking lot, while the lodging, administration and restaurant are stretched along the pier. Complementary elements like outdoor sport fields and the sailing school are disposed in a looser way in the alluvial landscape. The Sailing School has a close relation to the water.

The architecture is expressed as horizontally as possible in order to blend with the landscape. Extensive glazing surfaces of reduced height intensify the relation to the water and landscape, enhancing the feeling of inwardness in the buildings while keeping a strong panoramic visual relation to the outside. This aesthetical simplicity and coherence of buildings allow richness in material and structural principles instead of stylistic and formal overdetermination.»



Peronnes, AgwA, extract from the portfolio

6. FORT VI

Client	Maître d'ouvrage AG Vespa, Antwerpen
Budget	7 650 000 EUR excl VAT
Planning	2011, invited competition,
Team	AgwA (architecture) Landinzicht (landscape) Mouton (structure) Boydens (equipment)
Surface	construction ±5442 m ²
Status	-

The eight XIXth century Brialmont forts around Antwerp are the largest military fortification in Belgium. The star-shaped footprint of these forts is very recognizable, but paradoxically, they almost disappear visually in the suburban context. Their hidden landscapes are to be discovered and explored.

The school is an abstract, mysterious «fremdkörper» in the fort. This box, clad with transparent and reflective bronze glass is like a treasure box, in which all spaces are carefully arranged. The compact setting and the absolut transparency on the inside create surprising and dramatic relations between the school, the sports facilities and the public spaces. The simple concrete columns, beams and slab structures vary according to the needs and the rooms.

Fortuitously, the main circulation line of the building corresponds to the symmetry axis of the fort, conferring an almost cosmical interaction between the historical construction and the school.



Fort VI, AgwA, extract from the portfolio

The six projects are displayed in a navigation chart, following the typology of a grid.

ROWS

The six rows are devoted to the six key projects. Other projects might appear in the future or in the past, adding new rows. These projects correspond to the discoveries of specific praxemes or “ways of designing”. They also correspond to shifts in the understanding of the framework organizing the relationships between projects and praxemes.

project	Praxeme	Framework
A. Vertigo	Metaphorical Specificity	Heterogeneity
B. Metal	Flexible structural principles	Stepping Back
C. Philippeville	Spatial Genericity	Duality
D. Carré des Arts	Coincidence of Structure and Architecture	Pairing Back
E. Péronnes	Materiality as a Language	Open Additive Layeredness
F. Fort VI	Contextual Autonomy	Retroactive Layeredness

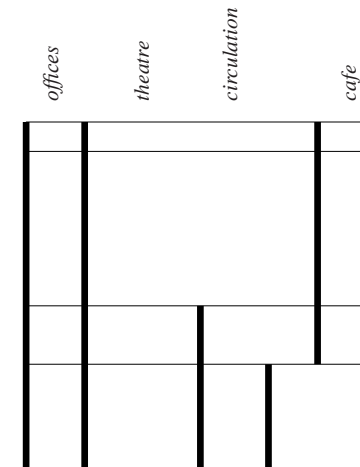
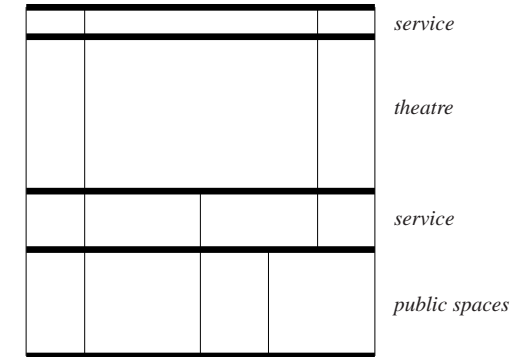
COLUMNS

A first group of columns contains analyses of the discovered praxemes.

A second group documents the projects according to the dimensions addressed by these praxemes.

A last column contains considerations and shifts on the level of the framework.

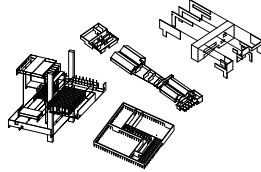

1. Praxeme : Explication of the discovered praxeme
2. Discovery process : the design process that led to the explication of a praxeme
3. Community : Comments and reflections about references, grouped around praxemes
4. Praxeme analyse : Analyse of the specific application of praxeme inside the project
5. Proliferation : Relationships and correspondence with other projects
6. Scale models
7. Concepts : relationships with Metaphorical Specificity
8. Plans : relationships with Spatial Genericity
9. Context (autonomy)
10. Structure (Flexible Principles, Coincidence)
11. Materiality (Materiality as a language)
12. Frameworks : interlinking of the praxemes and processes in the practice



*Deinze cultural center competition, charted combinatory programmatic scheme
1/1000, AgwA, 2012*

*The chart itself is an echo of the practice.
It is a simple spatial structure enabling a rich variety of possibilities*

Each element of the chart refers to a section of book two.
The chart is intended to be used as table of content of this second book.
Its pages are numbered by their position in the grid: A1, D5, F12...

	1. praxemes	2. discovery process	3. community	4. praxeme analyse	5. resonance	6. scale models	7. concepts	8. context	9. plans (space & functionality)	10. structure	11. materiality	12. Frameworks
A. metaphorical specificity												Heterogeneity
B. structure : flexible principles												Creative Input and Stepping Back
C. spatial genericity												Duality
D. structure & architecture : coincidence												Paring back
E. language through materiality												Additive Layeredness
F. contextual autonomy												Retroactive Layeredness

4. A few tracks through the chart

Now we have a chart, and can follow some tracks. The ones I develop further are not exhaustive, but significant of a potential diversity, and they make some key issues explicit. The two first and the fourth track are directly derived from the structure of the chart. The third one is an unexpected track, that is not a consequence of the structure of the chart, but that was made possible through the spatial unfolding of the elements. Last, the fifth track retraces the gradual birth of the chart through the research process.

5a. Track of Spatial Genericity

This linear track is easy to follow and needs little comment. It reveals the structure of the chart, and different aspects of one praxeme : explanation, discovery process, community, analyse, resonance in other projects. The project in Philippeville, through which it was discovered is documented.

5b. Track of Structural Strategies

Similarly to the track of Spatial Genericity, this interesting track shuffles transversally through the analyse of the structural strategies implemented in the 6 projects. It shows how a praxeme is not a constraining prison, but rather an attitude from which various strategies can be derived.

5c. Track of Modi Operandi

This non-linear track focuses on four apparently unrelated elements of the chart. It explores different design processes that are underlying, hidden modes of action of our practice, situated behind the praxemes. It is about working in series, being open for sudden revelations, about linearity and reabsorption of former researches.

5d. Track of the Praxemes and the Frameworks

This straightforward track unfolds a short narrative of the research through the accumulation of the «local» design-and-project-bound praxemes and through their implication in the successive shifts in the «global» framework of their organisation. It is a double, parallel track. It is a shortcut through the research process.

5e. Crooked Path

The Crooked Path as faithfully as possible relates the development of the research. It is appared to blind navigation in unknown seas. It narrates how the pieces of the chart were added and modified step by step, and how the structure of the chart appeared progressively, while keeping the nose in the grindstone. It is a path consisting of four paths, corresponding to each GRC (Graduate Research Conference).



symptomatic exhilaration

“sensemaker 1”, Harold Fallon, <http://www.agwa.be/sensemaker> (2007)

“Combinatory sense making : Dada, the cadavre exquis, Oulipo... I may be wrong, but in these approaches, I feel there is a fascination about the results of the combinations. Indeed, miracles can occur, which would not have happened without the input of randomness.

In my case, these kinds of methods are not really embedded in the practice to enhance creativity or to discover unexpected possibilities. Rather, I think that the combinatory methods are used in the playful -one could even say superficial- exploration of some issues.

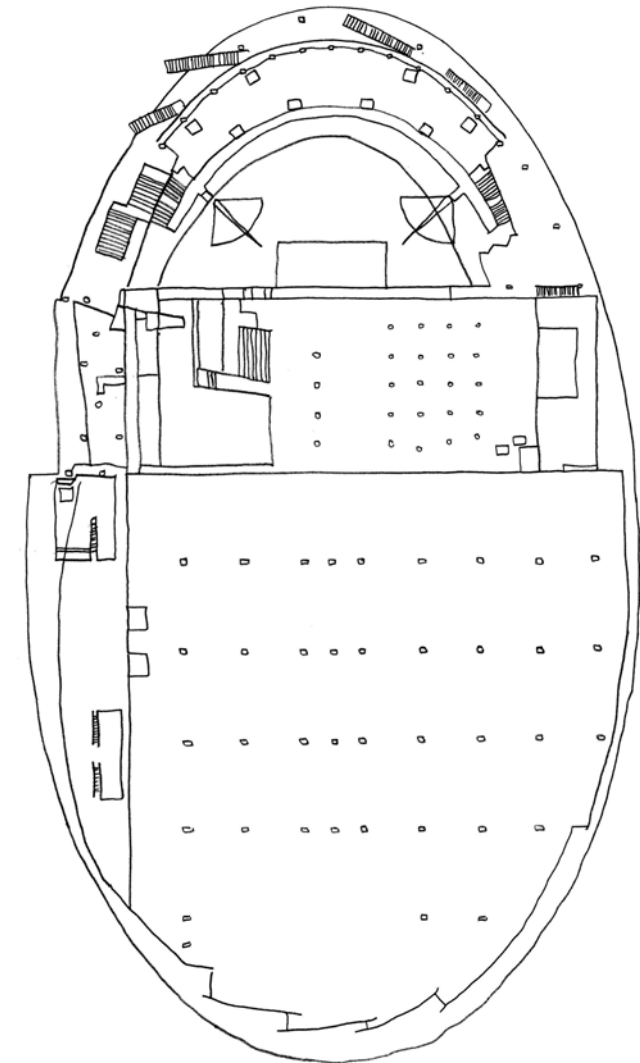
Then, they are also present more deeply in the structure of things.

In the sensemakers, it is not the combinations that matter, but the structure that makes them possible.

In the plan of the Philippeville project, it is not the actual plan, but the generative rules that gives birth to the plan.

In the "chart" of the practice, it is not the tracks that are explicitly described, but the structure that makes them visible.”

extract from an e-mail to R. Blythe and R. Glanville, H. Fallon, 04 july 2012



OMA, Congrexpo, Lille, France, 1996

Inside the decoupage of the egg-shaped footprint, it is not only the architecture of its components that matter in the end, it is also the very principle of their juxtaposition.

4a. Track of Spatial Genericity

“Essayer d’arriver au poème bref (texte bref, cru, adéquat) et en même temps faire à ce propos de longues études, des réflexions d’ordre méthodologique, moral, politique, que sais-je ! – intéressantes par elles-mêmes”

To attempt to achieve “short poems” (simple, raw, suitable text) and at the same time to make them become long studies, reflections on a methodological, moral or whatever level, interesting by themselves.

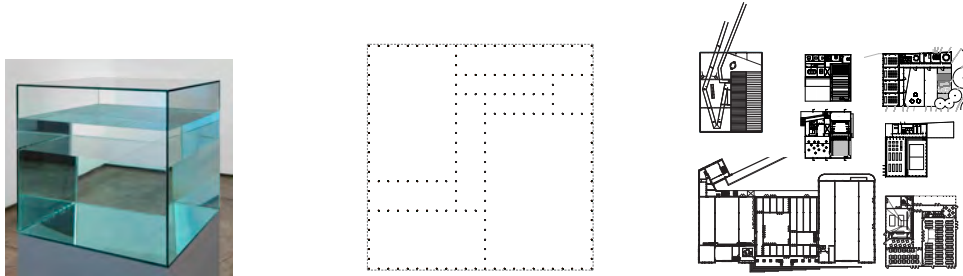
“Pour un Malherbe”, Ponge, p59, NRF, 1965, p70

In 2008, we took part in an invited competition for a masterplan for a school campus and the building of its restaurant in Philippeville, Belgium. Though we did not win the competition, the project was the door to various revelations and shifts in the practice.



C1. Praxeme
The square-shaped restaurant is organized by geometrical rules that generate functionality and spatiality. The project caused the discovery of “spatial genericity” as one of the fundamental praxemes of the office, in which the guide towards spatiality and functionality is the formulation of simple, but flexible compositional “rules”.

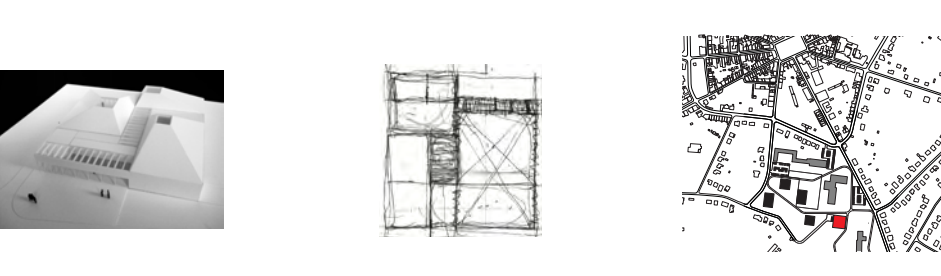
C2. Discovery Process
The process of the project led us from a first stage of formal exploration to a square footprint. Then a second stage explored the possibility of differentiation of spaces in a dual mode (servant/served spaces). Progressively, the hierarchy of spaces gave way to a feeling of equivalence and isotropy.



C3. Community
Some documents from our reference collection, we can consider part of our community of practice. These references are not analyzed neutrally. Rather, their inspirational role is explained : what do we see in them, how do they feed our imagination, and also, how do they differ from what we do. From Cordoba’s Great Mosque, to a plan by Sanaa, and Borromini’s San Andre alle Quattro Fontane.

C4. Praxeme Analyse
In the case of Philippeville, spatial genericity is achieved through a simple rule of uniqueness and complementarity. First, all spaces are unique rectangles. Second, it is impossible to extract a subset of spaces from the building, that form a rectangular footprint. The building is the smallest coherent whole.

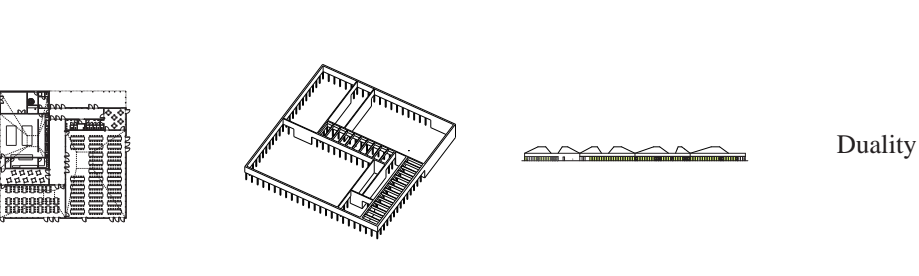
C5. Resonance
Other projects after and also before Philippeville share this praxeme, though applied differently. The cultural center in Deinze project is a threedimenensional spatial puzzle. The skin of the Vertigo defines a territory enveloping a collection of heterogeneous items. Peronnes traces an organizing line in the landscape, and the sport center in Neufchâteau explores linear sequences.



C6. Model
Scale 1/100. White foamboard.

C7. Concept.
The restaurant is located at the center of the campus : it is both the heart of daily life and of the redevelopment of the campus. Two words became the working hypotheses of the project : porosity (meaning openness, accessibility for all) and isotropy (meaning equivalence of orientations to all parts of the campus). These words and the plan typology were derived from the competition we had just finished for the Contemporary Arts Center BPS22 in Charleroi. Maybe this very rapid reintegration of similar design principles allowed AgwA to explore this possibility in depth. It is also the first occurence of the “recycling” of design strategies from one project into another.

C8. Context
The campus is a set of compact rectangular volumes homogeneously sprawled over the site. A pedestrian loop connects all elements and structure the site. The rule of isotropy and equivalence also applies to the masterplan.



C9. Plan

C10. Structure
The structure is derived from the plan, reduced to a dotted scheme, representing wooden columns with short interdistance, materializing the delimitation of the spaces and their porosity. The structure is then adapted to fit contingencies.

C11. Materiality
We attempted to reduce the expressivity of materiality. A waterproof skin of projected polyurethane confers a white, abstract expression to the building, which enhances the expressivity of the wooden interior. Immateriality is also a commitment with materiality.

C12. Framework.
Spatial Genericity, added to the praxeme of Metaphorical Specificity, situated our practice in a dual field, as the simple categorization of the projects by excluding, heterogeneous principles appeared too reductive.

Duality

4b. Track of Structural Strategies

“Il faudrait non point une rhétorique par auteur mais une rhétorique par poème”

What we need, is not a rethoric for each author, but rather a rethoric for each poem.

«Raisons de vivre heureux», Francis Ponge, Proèmes, t I, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, p 190 (dated 1928-1929)

Structural strategies play an important role in most projects of the office. Instead of “structural design”, we like to speak about strategies, because this allows to understand the behavior of the structure, to frame a dialogue between structure and architecture, rather than establishing a coercitive carcan. These strategies are specific to each project. However, they share common features like the induced formal flexibility, or the identification with the architectural design. The approach of structure is at the same time carefully calibrated, and loosely processed. It is an issue of balance between control and adaptation.

It is equally important to name the common denominator of these strategies, and to recognize their differences. In other projects, other strategies might appear, and strategies might also

A10. Vertigo : Independence

The shape of Vertigo’s polycarbonate skin has been defined according to a set of constraints, resulting in an irregular shape avoiding contact with the ground. The structure sustaining the skin is a pragmatic triangulation which is left as is. The coexistence of the structure and skin, each of them following its own rules, becomes a main condition of the project.

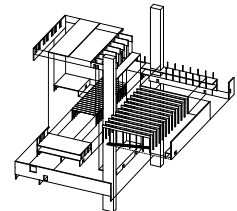
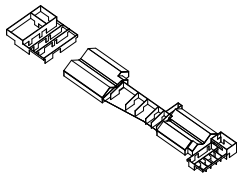
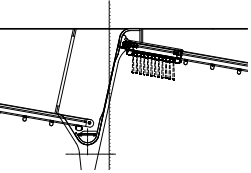
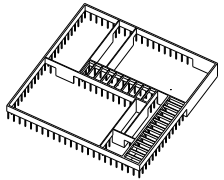
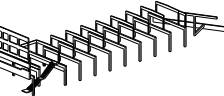
B10. Metal : Variations

All disturbing vertical structural elements are suppressed by the use of large beams overarching space from neighbour to neighbour. This principle is the project red line. First, it is restored in its original situation and then extended with a variety of structural solutions, like simple concrete or steel beams, the conservation of existing structural elements, or the realization of a two level Vierdendeel beam.

C10. Philippeville : Multiplication

The porous, dotted contour of the spaces of the Philippeville restaurant are materialized as simple, identical wooden columns, distibuted over the whole building with a unique interdistance. The multiplication and density creates a sense of collectivity. This in return allows derogations to the rule : suppression of some columns, filling of the space between other, and differentiating of structural solutions for the roofs (open roofs, flat roofs, pyramidal roofs).

10.
structure



D10. Carré des Arts - Integration

In this project, we face a hybrid system, a classical differentiation of skin and structure. However, the structure is not merely a servant support of a skin: they complement and define each other. The structure is shaped in order to integrate all architectural dimensions, and minimize the necessity of non structural accessories.

E10. Péronnes - Deformation

This sports center hosts a variety of buildings, which share the feature of panoramic windows on the ground level, that are completely free of columns. A system om concrete walls with cantilevers suspend the facade beams. This scheme is deformed and adapted to the variable geometries and situations.

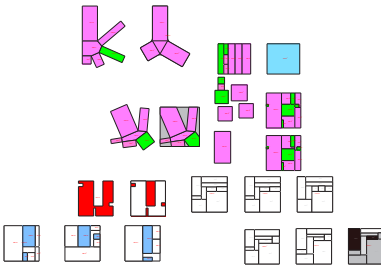
F10. Fort VI - Limited Collection

The spatial organization of the Fort VI sports school can be considered as a layered variation of the Philippeville project. Consequently, the structural issue is complexified. Instead of looking for a structural common denominator through typology or shape, we decided to work with one material. The structure proposes a variety of typologies and dimensions, and ensures coherence through the systematic use of concrete.

4c. Track of Modi Operandi

There are things that you do almost automatically, like writing with a red pen or with a blue one. Things that seem not to be particularly meaningful, like cleaning and ordering the work table everyday, or accumulating stuff in a seemingly chaotic way. In the practice also, behind the obviously meaningful issues, themes and ambitions, there are “ways of working”. They may seem to be mute and unarticulated, but in fact they are enabling and informing the practice.

C.
spatial genericity



D.
structure & architecture : coincidence



F.
contextual autonomy

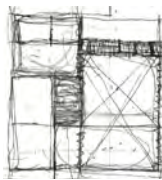
C2. Philippeville - Linear Seriality

The plan evolved in a linear way, from formal fibrillation towards duality and finally to a stable, isotropic plan. The process was almost exclusively linear, like a seamless morphing. It transforms, adapts, reshapes, refines, rescales, calibrates. I do not believe design is a essentially non-linear process. At least, for us, it is not excluding linearity.

D2. Carré des Arts - Iterative Variation

The shape of the project, mixing architecture, technology and structure, results less from a formal will than from an iterative process addressing different dimensions. Successive iterations cover the general typology, the general dimensions, the integration of technological elements, definition of the shape, etc. We observe that each iteration addresses one specific issue, leaving a certain indeterminacy upon other dimensions of the project. These are solved one by one in later iterations, and refine gradually the design. Some indeterminacy is left in each iteration, which will be solved later. This process was discovered retrospectively. Each iteration implies a phase of opening of possibilities (exploration) and a phase of reduction (decisionmaking). This is also a phenomenon of grouping of solutions, that allows to formulate work hypotheses on a more global level. It is definitely not a “multiple choice exercise”.

Note also that Iterative Variation can be considered a complexified modality of Linear Seriality (the linear succession of iterations). (cf book II, D2 for a larger image)

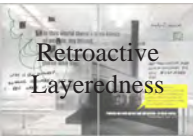


C7. Philippeville - Absorption

The Philippeville project is the first time we consciously reabsorbed a previous project in a new one. Referring the Ponge’s statement of “one rethoric for each poem” instead of “one rethoric for each author”, yes, but isn’t it unavoidable to develop at the same time a author-bound rhetoric through the accumulation of poem-bound rhetorics? It means that each project is specific, yes, but that projects group in convergent or divergent series on a larger level. The reabsorbed features are subjected to transformations, refinement, exploration of alternatives, grouping of families. Also perhaps, reabsorbing projects might be a kind of positive lazyness.

F12. Revelation

The discovery of the retroactive layeredness is an intuition that emerged from an image “out of the blue”. It is a superposition of a photograph of a installation of transparent photographs on plexyglass, on which are pasted sketches, reflections, quotes, texts. As if my obsession at this time, to reduce the arbitrariness of making choices, could also be solved by opting for all alternatives at the same time instead of making a single choice. The multiplicity of layers creates homogeneity and coherence. This led to the consideration that projects work alike : they address complementing and overlapping issues. It is their layeredness that allows the issue of arbitrariness to be addressed. “Revelation” is not a modus operandi in the strict sense : it may not be induced, prepared or provoked, unless by being open and available to the unexpectedness of novelty and unforeseen opportunities.



1.
praxemes

A.
metaphorical specificity

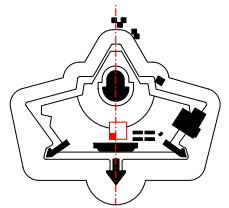


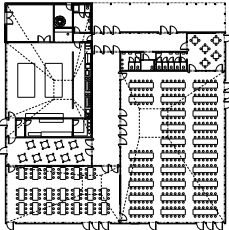
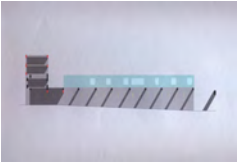

B.
structure : flexible principles

C.
spatial genericity

D.
structure & architecture : coincidence

E.
language through materiality

F.
contextual autonomy



4d. Track of Praxemes and the Frameworks

As the praxemes were developed and unveiled through the last years, the framework of their interrelations evolved. This track is a straight, linear shortcut through a perpetually evolving cloud.

A1. Metaphorical Specificity
Our first projects addressed quite circumscribed issues, either through their modest scale or through their simple program. We tended to identify them by the formulation of an hypothesis about them. This is metaphorical in nature. For instance, the Vertigo is a translucent black box, playing a game of (un)veiling what it contains. The precision of the formulation of the hypothesis implies its robustness, its capacity to go through the contingencies of the construction process.

A12. Heterogeneity
As a consequence, each project is essentially different. A first “operational dictionary” was developed, pointing out themes at work in different projects, forming together an heterogeneous toolbox.

B1. Structure : flexible principles
The Metal project is a low-cost refurbishment project. The existing structure is very simple, yet beautiful. How could we keep this quality, its evidence, and its simplicity, when we had to add new elements and modify parts, with the aggravating circumstance of not having money for elegant and precise detailing? A multiplicity of simple structural solutions were developed, sharing a strong common typology, allowing great flexibility in its application.

B12. Creative Input and Stepping Back
Metal was the first larger scale project of the office. Our strategy to address complexity was to multiply the creative inputs : each intervention can be considered a project with its own “metaphorical specificity”. However, I noticed that Metal was a turning point. The projects running after Metal were different : their themes rather pointed out a modification of the creative input by establishing abstract metaphors and common rules. They indicated a way of stepping back, of replacing the status of authorship in the design process.

C1. Spatial Genericity
As the office engaged in competitions, we addressed more complex programs. The nature of the metaphor of the Philippeville project is abstract: it is about the embodiment of the concepts of porosity and isotropy. Instead of installing a hierarchy of spaces, this project led us to consider equivalence as a virtue, and to establish geometrical rules generating spaces. This simple project-bound hypothesis of spatial genericity shifted to a recurrent tool in the practice and evolved into a praxeme.

C12. Duality
At this time, we considered the “generic” and the “specific” projects as two separate families, but some projects failed to correspond to this categorization. It turned into a dual model. The more generic a project is, the less metaphorical it becomes. Again, this proved too simplistic. Projects can be generic and specific at the same time (or not), in a variable and independent way.

D1. Architecture & Structure : Coincidence
In the period following Philippeville, we developed a feasibility study for the retractile covering of the Carré des Arts in Mons. The formulation of a strong flexible principle was not enough to embrace the reality of the project. The structure being predominant in this project, we attempted to integrate most architectural dimensions inside the structure itself. Structure and architecture coincided, in the sense that they became each others necessary and sufficient counterpart.

D12 Paring Back
The feasibility study was based upon three «ideas» we sketched for the competition. During the process, these three ideas expanded to a huge set of possible applicable, referenced solutions. Instead of choosing «the three best» of them, we grouped them in different overlapping categories, reducing the specificity of each solution to more general features of families. Then, three projects emerged from the application of these features. This process of expanding possibilities and paring back could also be a way of stepping back. (cf book II, D2)

E1. Language Through Materiality
The Sports Center at Peronnes is a larger project, including a set of (partly pre-existing) buildings. Its metaphorical specificity, the structural strategies and the genericity of its spatial principles failed to give access to all its dimensions. Materiality of the skins, overlapping with the structure, became a central point. Which materiality could we choose? How could we handle its stylistic connotation? How does it behave constructively? We felt materiality was the opportunity of a project-bound language.

E12. Open Additive Layeredness
Peronnes is the first project of the office addressing a set of buildings. The issue of Materiality allowed us to confer coherence to the whole. The framework evolved from duality to layeredness. I identified simple projects through a metaphor, solved more complex buildings including a set of rooms by adding spatial genericity, and conferred coherence to sets of buildings through the additional dimension of materiality. So to say, the idea was that the more complex an assignment is, the more tools you need.

F1. Autonomy
The sports school at Fort VI near Antwerp was to be designed inside an ancient star-shaped fortress. We did not to attempt an impossible articulation, or even worse an

unthinkable integration in the context. Instead, we chose to place an abstract box, a «fremdkörper» in the site, but to do it in such a precise and refined way, that it would change its context. Not to react to the context, but to make it react. The project is an autonomous thing in the context. Looking back to previous projects, we noticed that this was a recurrent scheme. Simple footprints, simple volumes, placed in such a way that an unexpected richness emerges. Again, the simple project-bound strategy was in fact a recurrent tool.

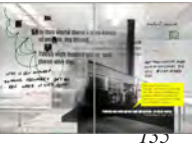
F12. Retroactive Layeredness
This was the first praxeme that was detected through the looking back to a project in relation to previous and other running projects. I understood that probably these praxemes do not allow us to address different degrees of complexity. They might all be present in all projects, with varying intensity, and different modalities. The layeredness is not to be considered as additive, it is rather retroactive, or at least, not dependent from any external factor (like complexity).

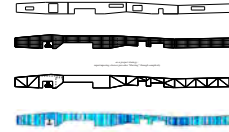
Duality

Paring back

Additive Layeredness

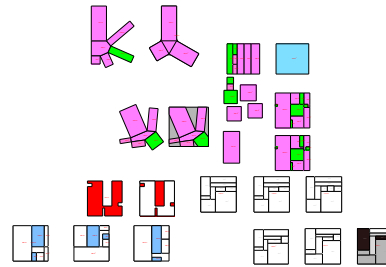
Retroactive Layeredness





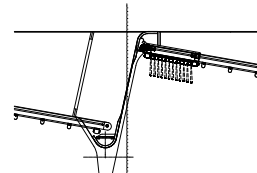
A.
metaphorical specificity

B.
structure : flexible principles



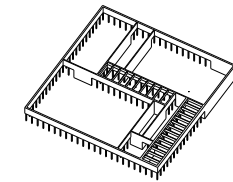
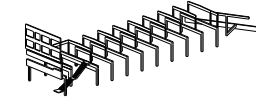
C.
spatial genericity

D.
structure & architecture : coincidence



E.
language through materiality

F. contextual autonomy



4e. Crooked Path (a)

The story of the construction of the elements of the chart from GRC to GRC. There was no conscious development of a chart, but its elements appeared progressively, constructing an unordered cognitive landscape. In the end, this landscape was organized in a chart.

1. April 2010

A1 : The Vertigo was presented as the result of «a constructed hypothesis». It is the firm formulation of what will remain a first fundamental praxeme.


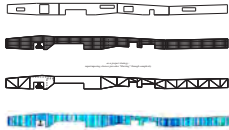
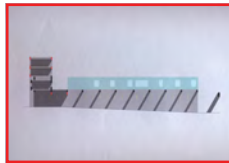
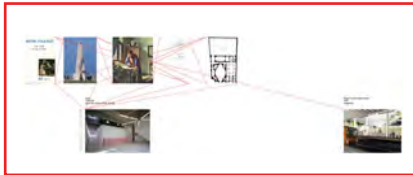
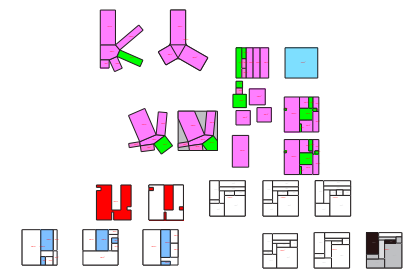



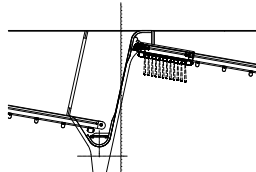
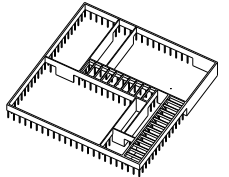

A4 : the application of the praxeme is analyzed. The hypothesis is modified and adapted to fit the structural, functional, aesthetic contingencies.



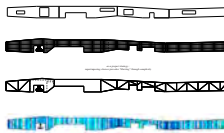

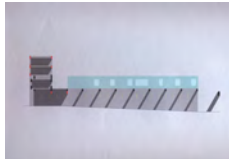
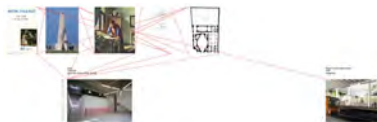

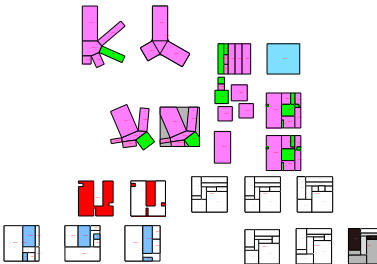
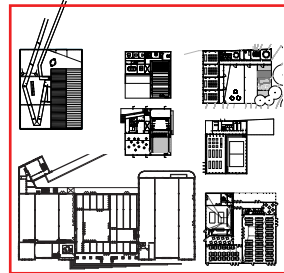
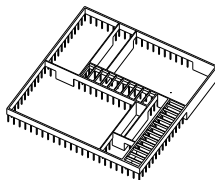



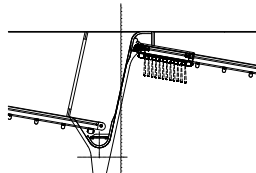

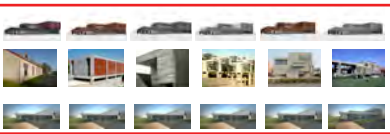

B10 : The structural strategy of Metal is analyzed. At this time, I present it as three strategies : conservation, intervention, reinvention, and evoke the potential of the flexibility of structural behavior versus a deterministic structural design. The latter will evolve into a praxeme.

C2 : The linear process of the plan research of Philippeville is explored. At this time, I do not speak of Genericity, but focus on the idea of «perfection», in the sense that the plan evolves from unfinished fibrillation towards «per-fected» stability (from the latin per-factum, evoking completeness, wholeness, stability).

C10 : The structural consequences of Philippeville's plan are explicited.

D3 and D4. : Carré des Arts. I explore the feasibility study, how the competition intuitions evolved into three project proposals. On the one hand, I express the idea of necessariness and how it is embodied. This will evolve into the praxeme of coincidence of structure and architecture. It is also a first spark of analysis of the design process, but at this time, the project is still in preliminary study, so it hasn't undergone a complete process.

	1. praxemes	2. discovery process	3. community	4. praxeme analyse	5. resonance	6. scale models	7. concepts	8. context	9. plans (space & functionality)	10. structure	11. materiality	12. Frameworks
A. metaphorical specificity												Heterogeneity
B. structure : flexible principles												Creative Input and Stepping Ba
C. spatial genericity												
D. structure & architecture : coincidence												Paring back
							4e. Crooked Path (b)					
							2. November 2010					
							During this GRC, I pinned three clouds of documents of the walls of Sint Lucas, exploring three dimensions of the practice. One is a bird-eye overview of the projects. The second is a closer look to the relationships of a project with a cloud of interests not directly embedded in the practice. Third, I decomposed the design process of an ongoing project.					
							A12 : First, I attempted to name «themes» at stake in different projects, which produced together what I called an «operational dictionary» of design tools. This dictionary evolved into an «Heterogeneity framework», in which each project is supposed to be completely independent from the other, questioning other issues.					
							B1, B2, B12 : Then, I explored how a shift in the practice accompanied the metal project. It was a cloud of relationships between the project, analysis of Zumthor ongoing at this time, reading, interest of baroque architecture and new projects, that shifted the practice from a very demiurgic attitude towards a more restrained one, interpreting Metal as a project that is the two simultaneously : a flexible principle (the praxeme is named) and at the same time, it is a well balanced choreography of heterogenous inventions.					
							D1, D2, D2 : Last, I analyzed the design process of the Carré des Arts, which led to the discovery of the praxeme explicated in the former GRC. By doing so, the praxeme is named, the discovery process developed, a framework of reference (community) established, and a framework sketched (it concerns the internal, underlying, fundamental process of multiplying solutions and paring them back)					

	1. praxemes	2. discovery process	3. community	4. praxeme analyse	5. resonance	6. scale models	7. concepts	8. context	9. plans (space & functionality)	10. structure	11. materiality	12. Frameworks
A. metaphorical specificity												Heterogeneity
B. structure : flexible principles												Creative Input and Stepping Back
C. spatial genericity												Duality
D. structure & architecture : coincidence												Paring back
E. language through materiality												Additive Layeredness
F. contextual autonomy												

4e. Crooked Path (c)

3. April 2011




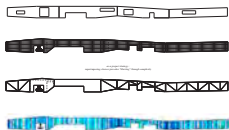

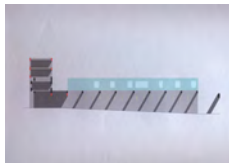

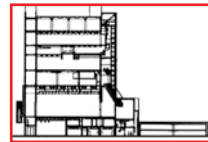
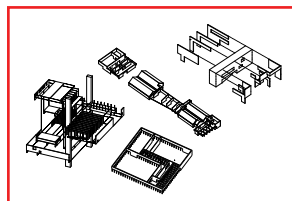
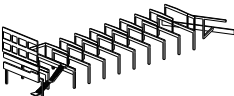

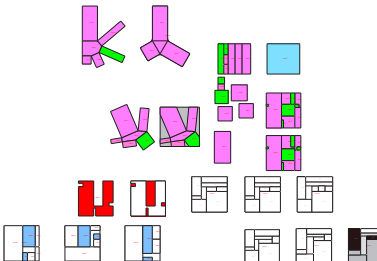

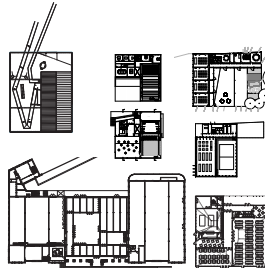
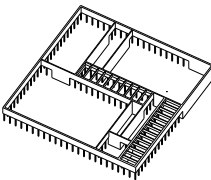



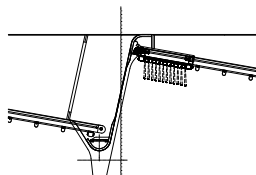
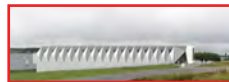

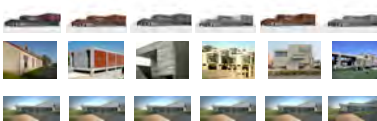






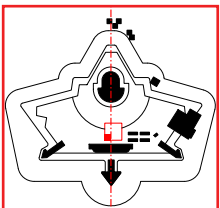
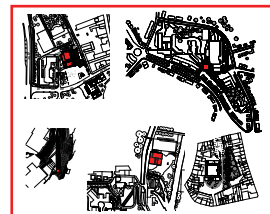


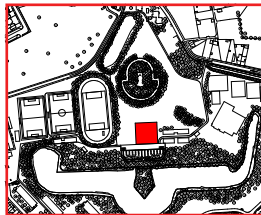
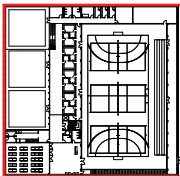
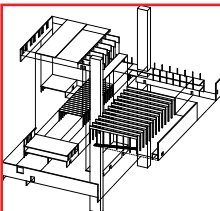


During this GRC, I first reworked the timeline of projects of the previous GRC with the «operational dictionary». This led to the distinction of two families of projects by praxeme (resonance) and their questioning by Péronnes, a new ongoing project, that seemingly did not fit these categories very well.

C1, A5, C5 :
By reworking the timeline, I made the distinction between the «Hypothesis Projects» which address Metaphorical Specificity, and the «Genericity Projects». The term «Genericity» appeared here, formalizing the praxeme of which «stepping back» might have been an intuition. By showing families of projects, the resonance of these two praxemes in various projets of the practice is explicited. The two families give birth to a dual framework, replacing the heterogeneous dictionary.

E1, E2, E4, E12 :

The Péronnes sailing center is an ongoing project that seems not to be situated easily in this dual model. It can’t be explained satisfactorily through this lens alone. The issue of materiality plays a central role in this project. What is at stake here is the choice of a materiality and the understanding of its «inherent rules», its «grammar», which I later would call a «language». The praxeme is developed, its discovery process inside the design process unveiled, its application analyzed, and the appearance of a new praxeme moved the framework from duality towards Additive Layeredness. At this time, the interpretation is that the layers of praxemes are superposed and allow to handle projects of growing complexity (from single items, to set of rooms, and finally sets of buildings).

During this single GRC, a framework was presented (duality) and then replaced by another one (additive layeredness). This is due to the delay of six months between GRC’s. The research is an ongoing process, and the GRC a sounding board.

	1. praxemes	2. discovery process	3. community	4. praxeme analyse	5. resonance	6. scale models	7. concepts	8. context	9. plans (space & functionality)	10. structure	11. materiality	12. Frameworks
A. metaphorical specificity												Heterogeneity
B. structure : flexible principles												Creative Input and Stepping Back
C. spatial genericity												Duality
D. structure & architecture : coincidence												Paring back
E. language through materiality												Additive Layeredness
F. contextual autonomy												

4e. Crooked Path (d)

4. November 2011

F12 :
This GRC started with a «revelation» regarding the framework triggered by the rediscovery of an ancient image I had made : the layeredness is probably not additive to respond to growing degrees of complexity, but all dimensions might be present simultaneously regardless of the type, scale or time of a project (cf track of Modi Operandi)

F1 to F11 :
The competition for a sports school at Fort VI seemed to be such a layered project. I analyzed the three praxemes explicitly present up to this day (Metaphorical Specificity, Genericity, Language through Materiality), and documented the project. In doing so, I discovered that the autonomous localization of the project in its context was similar to many other projects : here we had a new praxeme that I called «contextual autonomy». Then also, I remarked that the considerations about structure («Flexible Principles» and «Coincidence») were never considered as fully valuable praxemes, which they in fact are. F1 to F11 are the exploration of these dimensions in the project.

A3, B3, C3, E3, F3 :
For each praxeme, a set of references was sketched (it had to be completed), and formed the premise of a structured community of practice.

A5, B5, D5, E5, F5 :
For each praxeme, I looked at former and ongoing projects to check if the retroactive layeredness was credible.

Though it was not explicated at the time, in fact we had the structure of a grid, which eventually would evolve into this chart.

148

151

4e. Crooked Path (d)

4. November 2011

F12 :
This GRC started with a «revelation» regarding the framework triggered by the rediscovery of an ancient image I had made : the layeredness is probably not additive to respond to growing degrees of complexity, but all dimensions might be present simultaneously regardless of the type, scale or time of a project (cf track of Modi Operandi)


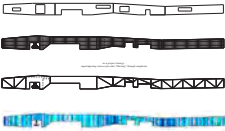
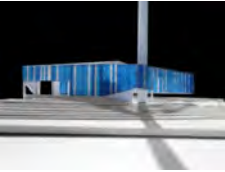


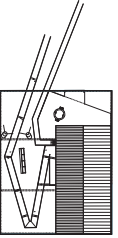


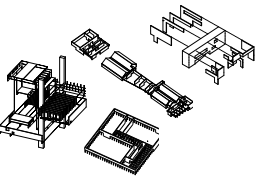
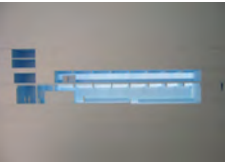
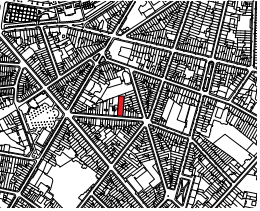
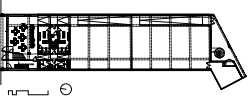
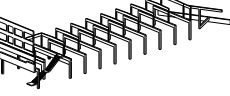

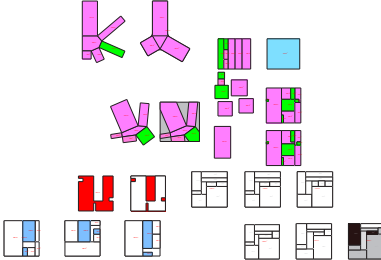
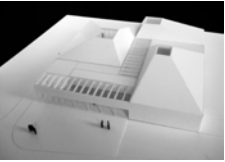
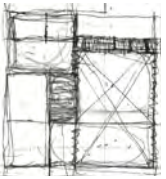
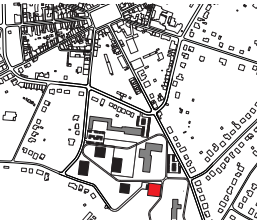
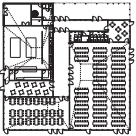
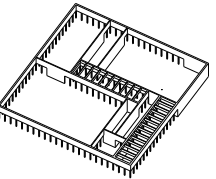



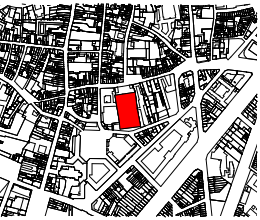
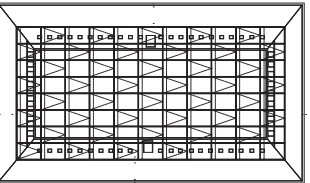
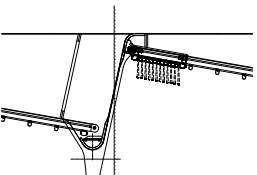

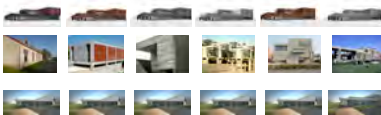
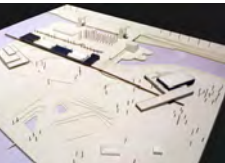
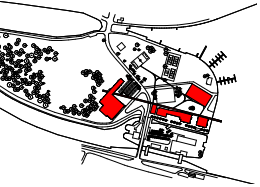
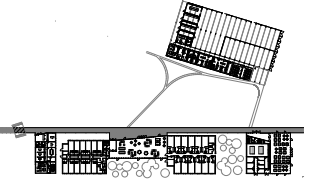
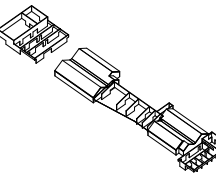


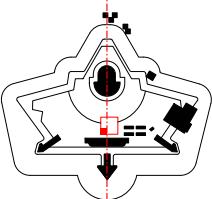

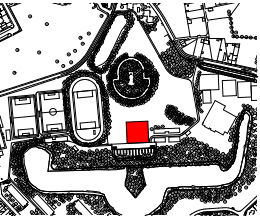
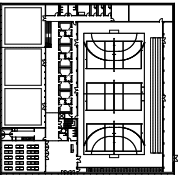
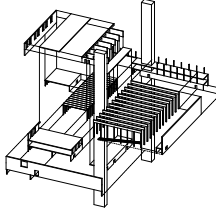


F1 to F11 :
The competition for a sports school at Fort VI seemed to be such a layered project. I analyzed the three praxemes explicitly present up to this day (Metaphorical Specificity, Genericity, Language through Materiality), and documented the project. In doing so, I discovered that the autonomous localization of the project in its context was similar to many other projects : here we had a new praxeme that I called «contextual autonomy». Then also, I remarked that the considerations about structure («Flexible Principles» and «Coincidence») were never considered as fully valuable praxemes, which they in fact are. F1 to F11 are the exploration of these dimensions in the project.

A3, B3, C3, E3, F3 :
For each praxeme, a set of references was sketched (it had to be completed), and formed the premise of a structured community of practice.

A5, B5, D5, E5, F5 :
For each praxeme, I looked at former and ongoing projects to check if the retroactive layeredness was credible.

Though it was not explicated at the time, in fact we had the structure of a grid, which eventually would evolve into this chart.

	1. praxemes	2. discovery process	3. community	4. praxeme analyse	5. resonance	6. scale models	7. concepts	8. context	9. plans (space & functionality)	10. structure	11. materiality	12. Frameworks	
A. metaphorical specificity												Heterogeneity	
B. structure : flexible principles						4e. Crooked Path (e) 5. April 2012 Penultimate presentation. The idea of the chart to navigate the practice is formalized during this GRC: as all praxemes can be analyzed in each project, there is no reason not to consider it as a filter for all projects. The transversality of the praxemes gave birth to a strict grid.		The missing cells of the chart were completed. I remarked (and was commented in previous GRC's) that I had documented very little the projects, that the panels had little access to the projects themselves.					Creative Input and Stepping Back
C. spatial genericity						First, we have the praxemes being discovered, referenced, made explicit, analyzed and compared with other projects from the practice (columns 1 to 5). Second, I simply document the projects by a scale model and through the lens of the different praxemes (columns 6 to 11). Conveniently, I remarked that the praxemes addressed the design process oriented towards fundamental dimensions of architecture: concept, context, plan (space and functionality), structure, materiality. Last, the frameworks corresponding to each moment of the research, or to each project, or to each praxeme, are recapitulated (row 12).						Duality	
D. structure & architecture : coincidence												Paring back	
E. language through materiality												Additive Layeredness	
F. contextual autonomy												Retroactive Layeredness	

	1. praxemes	2. discovery process	3. community	4. praxeme analyse	5. resonance	6. scale models	7. concepts	8. context	9. plans (space & functionality)	10. structure	11. materiality	12. Frameworks
A. metaphorical specificity												
B. structure : flexible principles												
C. spatial genericity												
D. structure & architecture : coincidence												
E. language through materiality												
F. contextual autonomy												

4f. Exhibition Track

The exhibition is not an exhaustive reproduction of the chart. Instead, it makes use of the chart to develop a narrative showing how the practice evolved over the last years in the framework of «metarbitrariness», showing which praxemes were discovered and how, and also, showing the role played by the design processes as fundamental support of those design strategies.

The elements of the chart that are highlighted are chosen according to multiple objectives. First, the projects should be documented well, hence the completeness of the rows 6, 8, 9, 10, 11. Second, all the different dimensions of the chart are addressed, as a kind of exhaustive sampling. At least one element of each column is represented, they are chosen in function of their level of relevance inside the research process.

A : the formulation of a praxeme and its analysis formed a firm base for the research.

B. The resonance of the praxeme of flexible structural principles is explicated in the 6 key projects, showing how a praxeme also is a kind of «flexible principle», and not a constraining law to be obeyed.

C. D. E. The design processes are particularly meaningful in those projects. They show how choices are operated. They are the flesh of the projects. In C, the reabsorption of the BPS22 project as a concept, is also meaningful.

F. Community of practice. There has been a long term fascination for black squares during the whole research process. With Fort VI, it became clear that this had a strong relationship with the praxeme of autonomy. The framework of retroactive layeredness is evoked, as it is its last evolution, and also is representative of the openness to revelation as a process.

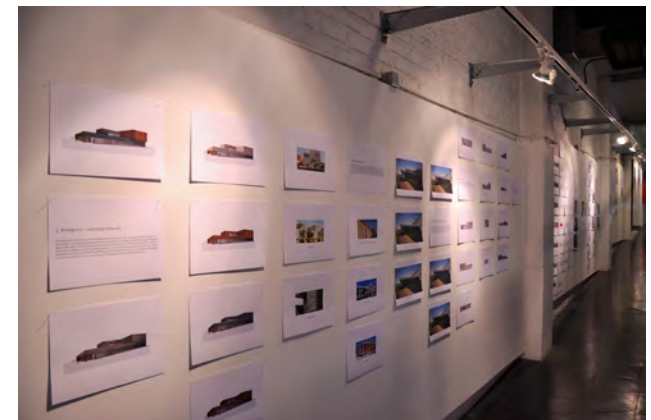
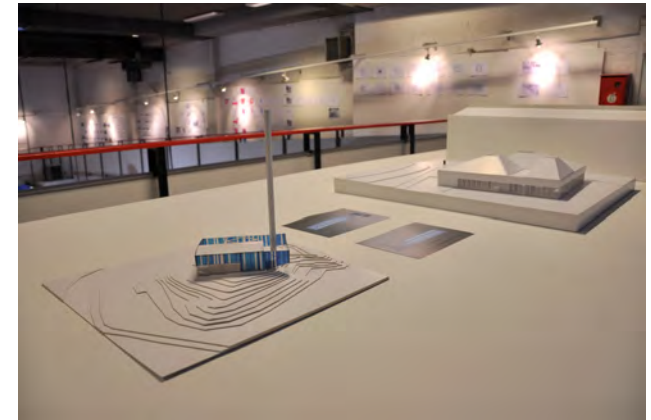
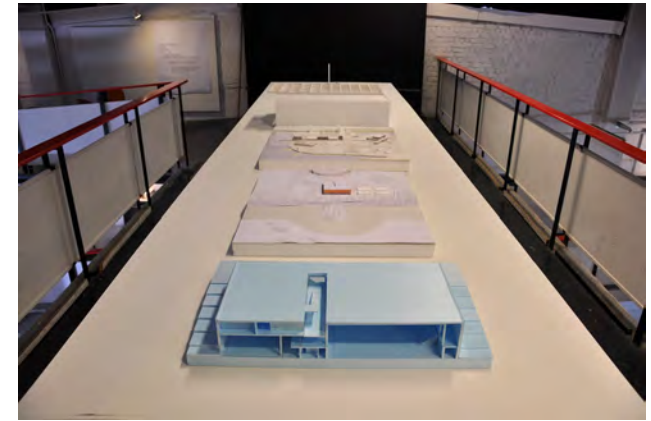
5. Exhibition record

“First, I must point out that the exhibition’s name differs from the PhD. There are various reasons for this. First, the exhibition is not the PhD. It is part of its output and highlights key points out of it, but can’t be considered as a complete equivalent. Second, the intended exhibition was the realization scale 1:1 of the complete chart. The very special and linear nature of the exhibition space made it impossible to implement this plan. Instead, I had to develop a new track through the chart, which was a unexpected way of using the chart to develop another narrative. Last, the choice of exhibiting at “Civa hors les murs” is linked to the opportunity to make the exhibition accessible to the public. As such, the exhibition is also an exhibition intended for the office and oriented to a broader public.”



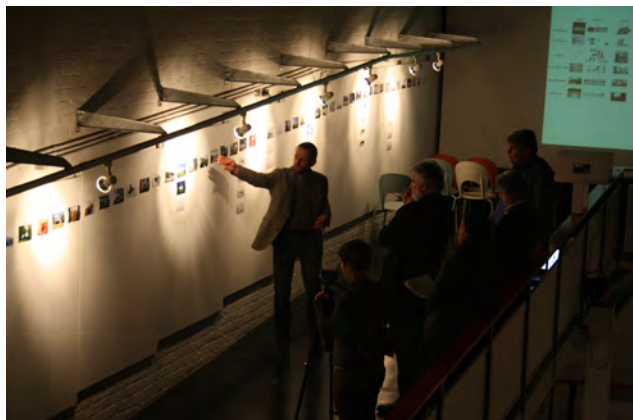
*rewritten extract of the introduction to the examination
november 26th 2012*

Flyer / Poster



Exhibition

Exhibition



Examination nov. 26th 2012

Examination nov. 26th 2012

AgwA

an architecture of practice

The exhibition space is linear.

The following elements were displayed in their mentioned succession.

0. Introduction : 1 A0 print 80g - introductory text
1. sensemakers : 3 flat screens, looping slideshows
2. AgwA timeline : 75 photographs 10*15cm, highlight of the 6 key projects, themes
3. slideshow : beamer with images of the 6 projects
4. metaphorical specificity : 1 panel 40*84cm forex 5mm
5. structure : 6 panels 40*84cm forex 5mm
6. sentence : A0 print
7. models : 7 models (base 330 * 140 cm)
8. processes : 4 groups of A4 color prints 180g (18, 37, 82, 43 pages)
9. plans : 6 panels 40*84cm forex 5mm
10. community : 1 panel 40*84cm forex 5mm
11. situation plans : 6 panels 40*84cm forex 5mm
12. layered image : 60*30 cm forex 5mm

exhibition content

AgwA architecture office was founded in 2003 in Brussels by Harold Fallon and Benoît Vandenbulcke.

As many others, the office was almost immediately projected in the arbitrary realm of a deconstructed architectural field, with a vast amount of masters to look at, with infinite technical possibilities, and with landscapes that are continuously reshaped.

Are there still relevant ideologies to follow or is architecture recentering on individual practices? During 9 years of intensive practice, the work of AgwA in Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia has embodied a permanent research on these issues.

The exhibition contains 6 main projects and retraces how AgwA developed a coherent architectural approach beyond the issue of arbitrariness, and how the inner design processes became its underlying condition.

The exhibition is organized in the framework of the doctoral research by design practice led by Harold Fallon at the RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) with the support of LUCA School of Arts - Sint-Lucas Architectuur in Belgium.

AgwA an architecture of practice

AgwA architecture office was founded in 2003 in Brussels by Harold Fallon and Benoît Vandenbulcke.

As many others, the office was almost immediately projected in the arbitrary realm of a deconstructed architectural field, with a vast amount of masters to look at, with infinite technical possibilities, and with landscapes that are continuously reshaped.

Are there still relevant ideologies to follow or is architecture recentering on individual practices? During 9 years of intensive practice, the work of AgwA in Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia has embodied a permanent research on these issues.

The exhibition contains 6 main projects and retraces how AgwA developed a coherent architectural approach beyond the issue of arbitrariness, and how the inner design processes became its underlying condition.

The exhibition is organized in the framework of the doctoral research by design practice led by Harold Fallon at the RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) with the support of LUCA School of Arts - Sint-Lucas Architectuur in Belgium.

Le bureau d'architecture AgwA a été fondé en 2003 à Bruxelles par Harold Fallon et Benoît Vandenbulcke.

Comme beaucoup d'autres, le bureau a été immédiatement projeté dans l'arbitraire d'un champ architectural déconstruit, avec un grand nombre de pratiques à observer, des possibilités technologiques infinies et des paysages en perpétuelle transformation.

Peut-on encore se fier à des idéologies dominantes, ou bien l'architecture est-elle en train de se recentrer sur des pratiques individuelles? Au cours de 9 ans de pratique intensive en Wallonie, à Bruxelles et en Flandre, le travail d'AgwA incarne une recherche permanente sur ces questions.

Au travers de 6 projets, l'exposition retrace le développement d'une approche architecturale pertinente au-delà de la question de l'arbitraire, et la manière dont les processus internes des projets en sont devenus la condition sous-jacente.

L'exposition se tient dans le cadre de la recherche doctorale réalisée par Harold Fallon au RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) avec le soutien de LUCA School of Arts - Sint-Lucas Architectuur.

Het architectenbureau AgwA werd opgericht in 2003 in Brussel door Harold Fallon en Benoît Vandenbulcke.

Zoals vele anderen, was het bureau meteen geconfronteerd met het arbitraire van een gefragmenteerd architectuurveld, met talrijke praktijken om naar te kijken, met een oneindig aantal technische mogelijkheden en met landschappen die constant evolueren.

Zijn er nog relevante ideologieën om te volgen of is de architectuur zich optuigt aan het concentreren op individuele praktijken? De eerste 9 jaren van intensieve praktijk van AgwA in Vlaanderen, Brussel en Wallonië belichamen een permanent onderzoek over deze vragen.

De tentoonstelling bevat 6 projecten en toont de ontwikkeling van een coherente architecturale benadering verder dan de vraag van het arbitraire en hoe het interne ontwerpproces de onderliggende conditie werd.

De tentoonstelling vindt plaats in het kader van het doctoraatsonderzoek van Harold Fallon aan het RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) met de ondersteuning van LUCA School of Arts - Sint-Lucas Architectuur.

0. Introduction
A0 print - introductory text



*1. sensemakers
3 flat screens, looping slideshows*



*2. AgwA timeline
75 photographs 10*15cm, highlight of the 6 key projects, themes*



3. slideshow
beamer with images of the 6 projects

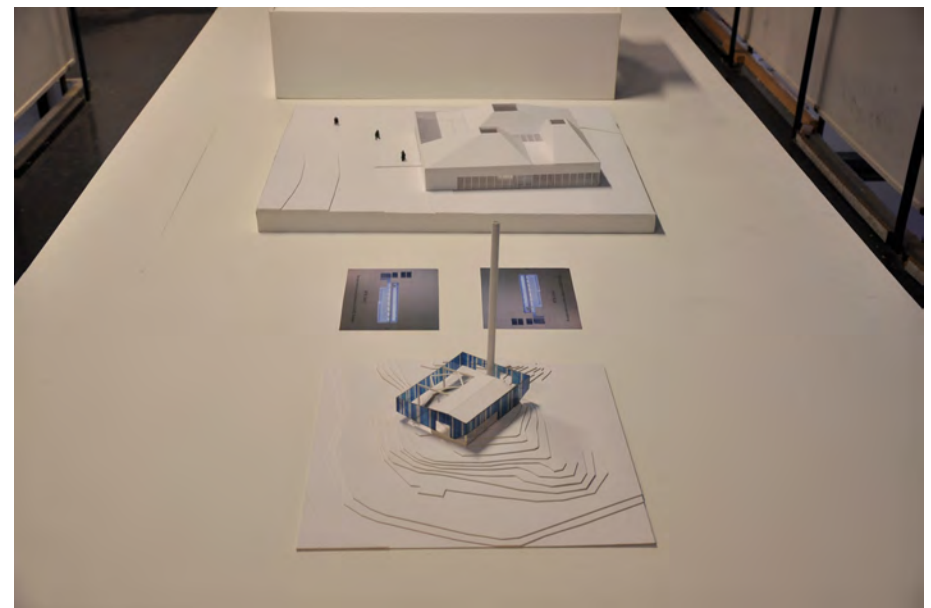
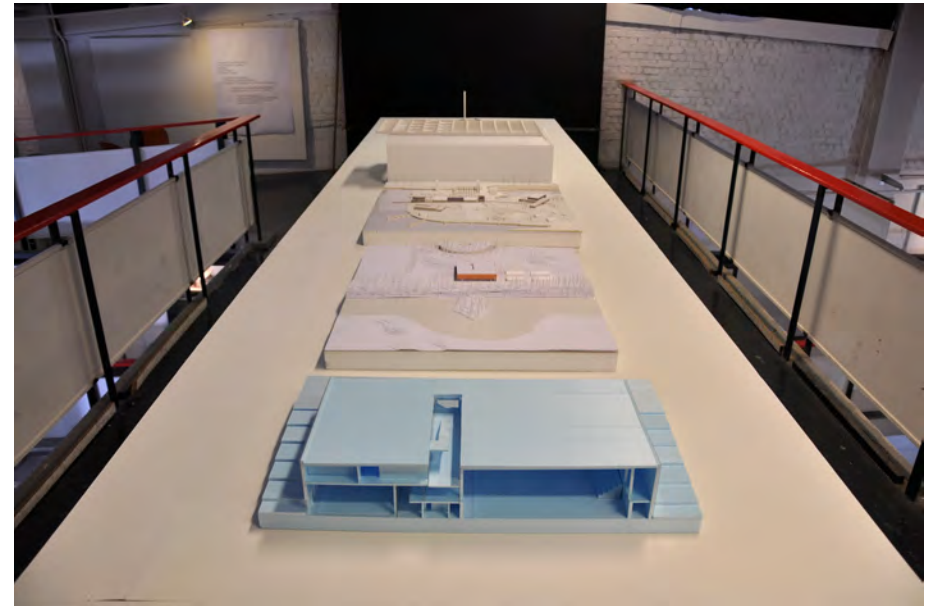
In the end, it could all be about
the formulation of hypotheses
which are
specific enough
and generic enough

to provide a strong identity
to resolve any degree of complexity
to respond to local and global constraints and potentials.

These hypotheses can address different issues
like spatiality, program, structure or materiality

Once formulated precisely
(after an explorative process of variable length)
there is a point in which these hypotheses
can simply be applied or built.

6. sentence
A0 print



7. models
7 models (base 330 * 140 cm)



8a. processes - BPS 22
18 A4 color prints



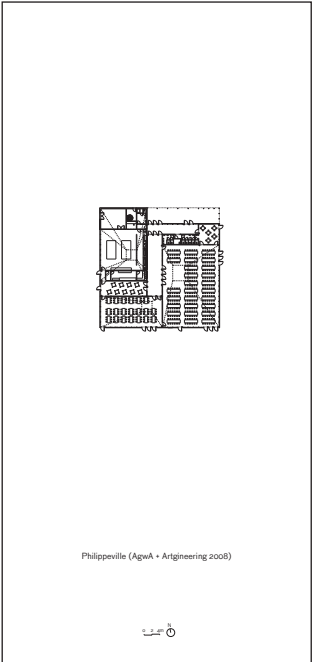
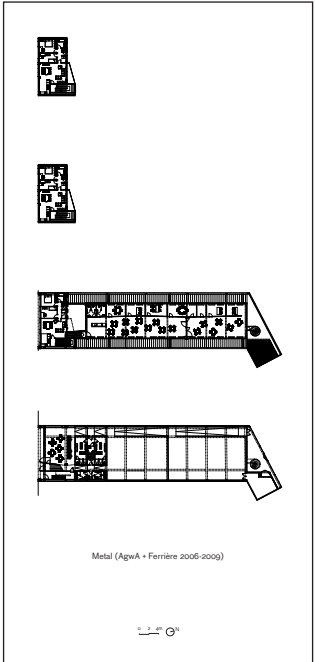
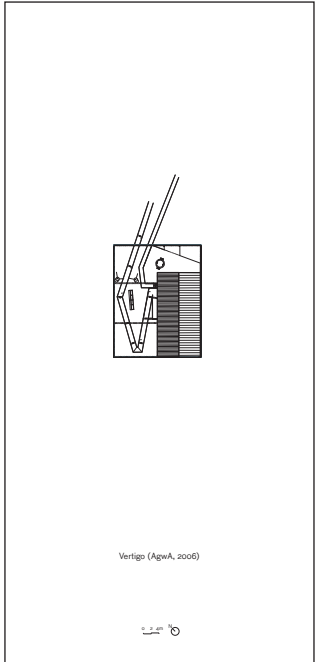
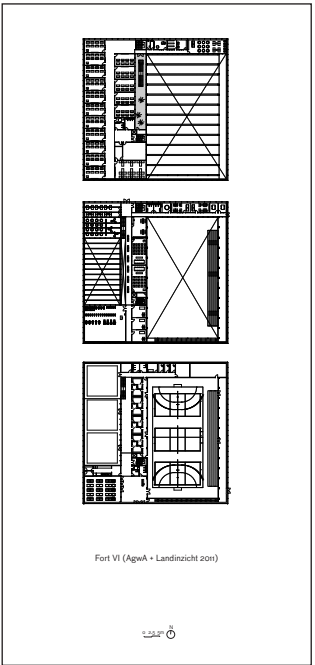
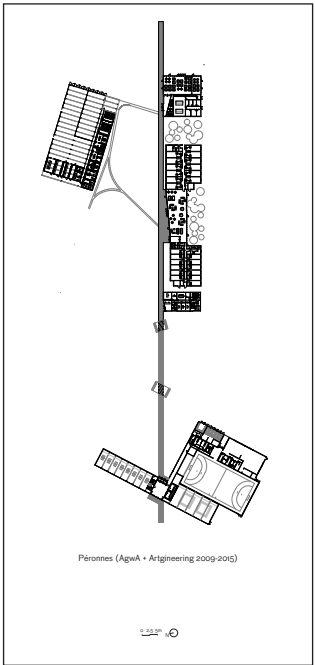
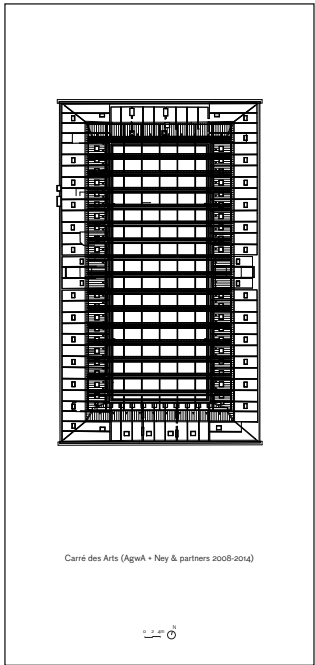
8b. processes - Philippeville
37 A4 color prints



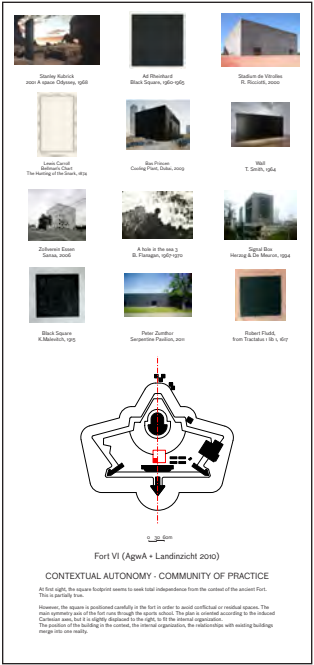
8c. processus - Carré des Arts
82 A4 color prints



8d. processus - Péronnes
43 A4 color prints



9. plans
6 panels 40*84cm forex 5mm



10. community
1 x 40*84cm forex 5mm

6. Communities of practice

6a. Diffuse Community

My partner has a research ongoing about the role of materiality in the design process, which he explores through the work and the writings of Zumthor, Sanaa and Herzog & De Meuron. Through the analysis of their projects (mainly in the '90, early '00), through discussions about their work and their relationships with our own practice, they really have become “part of the office”.

His aim is to analyze their work using a designer point of view and tools, similarly to what I did with our practice. The difference lies evidently in the purely retroactiveness and interpretativeness of his research, while in the case of AgwA, the design work is in progress and coincides with the research. Through the analysis of projects, he develops possible, useful design tools. The proposition is not so much that these tools be the same as those detected in the work of the analyzed architects, but rather, to develop a conceptual set of strategies for the making of architecture, taking into account the materiality in the design process.

Indeed, these three architects are addressing very strongly the dimension of materiality in the design process, with divergent strategies. I see these as possible attitudes towards our own issue of the fragmentation of the architectural field. They offer different possible reactions to the tremendous contemporary flow of trends, styles, possibilities and information. It is interesting to consider this work as a source of inspiration for the practice, which it has certainly been, but also, to consider AgwA as fundamentally questioning and triggering activity for the interpretation of the projects by Zumthor, Sanaa and Herzog & De Meuron.

I will explain shortly some considerations that are part of his PhD. Dissonances and similarities with the actual design works and the research on and through AgwA's practice will be obvious. Indeed the issue of materiality addresses textures and structure, but also the relationship with the spatiality and in some extent, to the context. These dimensions are also present in my research, applied to AgwA's practice.

Each of these architects makes use of different strategies inside the specificity of their practice. At the office, we are influenced by all this in the way we think about projects, but we also do differ. The present research is also a search for our specificities and their development. This “community” is not related directly to our projects, nor to this research. It works more in a diffuse and mutual way.

Through the two books, reference material is shown, commented on and reflections are made on this work. These references are all part of communities of practice which it is useful to contextualize. It is important to understand that these references work as sources of inspiration, but that they are also questioned by the practice and the research.

These communities are structured in three overlapping families.

First, the «diffuse community» is the community formed by architects analyzed by my partner through its own doctoral research. I attach special importance to this category, because this research was very embedded in the office, developed next to my own PhD, and addresses overlapping issues. Both the practice with my PhD and Benoît's PhD have influenced each other significantly.

Second, the «research community» is formed by the assessors, commenters at the GRC's and the peers.

Third, the «statistical community» consists of all the referential architects, artists, photographers, designers, that are source of inspiration for our work.

Zumthor is taking the position of a hermit, closing its architecture to the influences of the world. In his projects, he follows strictly what matter wants. His projects are not contaminated by the outside world. It is an architecture of enclosed cells.

Spatially, his projects tend to be placed in the context, but the dialogue is limited to the presence of a “block” or monolith. There is no interpenetration of interior and exterior. If windows appear, they look out in the distance. Often the entrance happens through a umbilical cord. Lighting is often indirect. Inside and outside materiality are often differentiated. On the constructive plane, the buildings proceed from a very controlled “constructive seed”, that develops strictly according to its own rules.

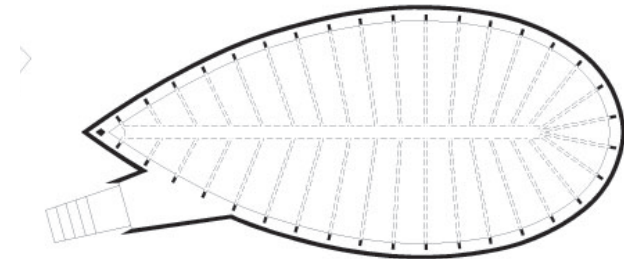
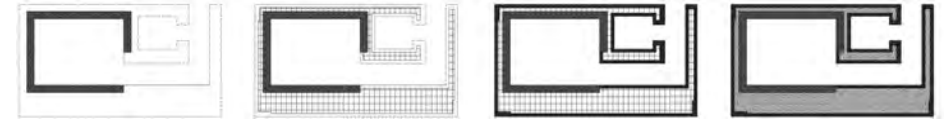
“Architecture is normally not something continuous or monolithic. It is constituted of multiple parts, often referring to different scales. The challenge is therefore for Zumthor to merge distinct elements into one single monolith. The choice of materials, their assortment and their implementation system are fundamental ingredients in the design process, together with the spatial principles enhancing a great autonomy of the building, in order to create a new, unique “construction material” from different elements, and let it develop according to its own and unique rules in an undisturbed way.

The “Rohbau” approach of Zumthor produces three different types of monoliths. Massive monoliths are the most obvious ones, in which the matter itself is monolithic and jointless.

Assembled monoliths appear when the elements are countable elements, like wood elements. However, we can consider this type of building as a kind of monolith rather than a composed structure, because all elements are made to fit each other in the light of the whole. As such, every part of the structure is necessary. These structures are not strictly repetitive, meaning that parts can share features but are still unique in their shape or position.

Composite monoliths consist of two radically different elements that merge into a new, irreducible constructive method, in which the two elements are complementary and necessary to the other.” (1)

1. “Concretion, abstraction: the place of materials in architectural design processes. Case study: Peter Zumthor”, Benoît Vandenbulcke, ARCC 2011, Detroit, 2011



Zumthor
 Vals Therme : a composite monolith
 Bruder Claus Chapel : a massive monolith
 Sankt Benedikt chapel : an assembled monolith
 drawings by Benoît Vandenbulcke

Sanaa is attempting to become transparent to the world's influences by translating spatial schemes directly into reality. Their buildings tend to offer a zero-resistance to the fluxes of the world and of reality. Their attitude is opposite to Zumthor : to absolute enclosure and autonomy, they oppose absolute openness and flexibility.

They achieve this by bending materiality into a relativity that is at the same time abstract and concrete. They seek to avoid any interference between the constructive, material reality, and the abstract diagram.

There are various strategies to achieve this. I quote the structure of a paper, that address different layers in which materiality could interfere with the abstraction.

“3.4.1 Diagrams and the physicality of matter

a. Compaction of complexes into one solid

In some projects, the traditional complexes are replaced by some materials integrating all physical functions or to specific project-bound solutions that allow combining all these functions into one solid.

- 1: Toledo Museum (glass, steel – readymade monolith matter)
- 2: Zollverein Essen (concrete – made to measure monolith matter)
- 3: Moriyama House (compacted complex)

b. Reduction of physical functions

1. Institut Valencia d'Art Modern extension (perforated steel plate)

3.4.2 Diagrams and the textures of materiality

a. Layering all over

- 1: Bowery New Museum, New York (stretched steel plate)

b. Textures

- 2: Seijo Houses (brick - geometric calibration)

c. White

3.4.3 Diagrams and the disposition of matter in space

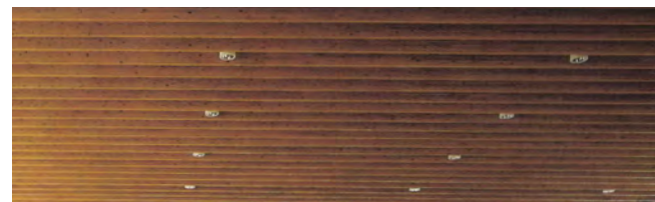
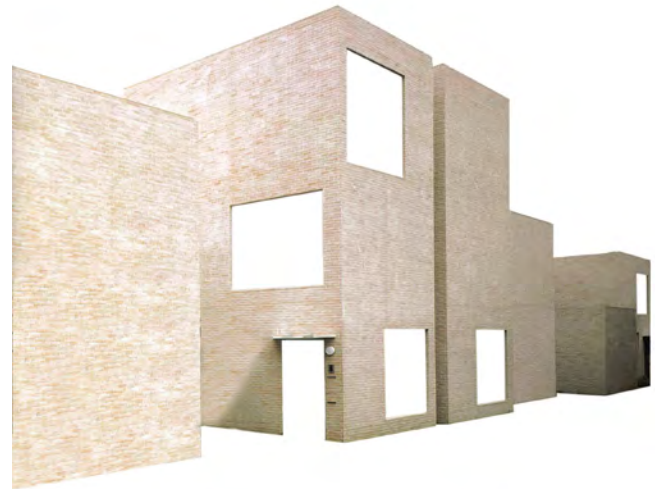
a. Surfacing repetition

- 1: Naoshima Ferry Terminal (ribbed steel sheets)
- 2: Multipurpose Facility in Onishi (wooden beams)

b. Spatial repetition

- 1: Park Café, Koga (steel cylindrical columns)” (1)

1. “Concretion, abstraction : the place of design processes in today architecture practice. case study : SANAA”, Benoît Vandenbulcke, ICAUD conference, Tirana, 2012



Sanaa
 Valencia : the physicality of matter, reduction of physical functions
 Seijo House : Textures of materiality, textures
 Onishi multipurpose facility : surfacic repetition

Herzog & De Meuron react to the world's complexity by giving an account of how things are constructed, by pushing materials to their limits, by researching what materials can achieve, what they afford. Compared to Sanaa's transparency and Zumthor's enclosure, they propose an open attitude, but in which there is a friction.

"I believe we are trying to create a piece of reality that can be dismantled, if you will, and therefore becomes understandable. After all, we are surrounded by so many things and secrets we cannot decipher, to which we have no access. For that reason, we are producing objects that offer their own language. Such an offering expresses hope."

Jacques Herzog, 1988

In his analysis of the work of Herzog and De Meuron, Benoît differentiates three approaches.

1. the box – non structural stacking

"In a first set of projects, Herzog & de Meuron use the figure of the rectangle and the box. (...) this conceptual a priori expressed the wish to work beyond figurative temptations."(1)

In this family, he distinguishes three sub-groups. First, the projects in which a coherent constructive system is developed, based upon an industrial material (stacking of panels at Ricola warehouse in Laufen). Second, materials can be used as they are intended, but in combination with other materials (dry stone in concrete structure for the house in Tavole). Third, materials can be used in a way that is not natural (stone gabions for the Dominus Winery in California). In this group, the structure is adapted to the skin, there is a match between the two.

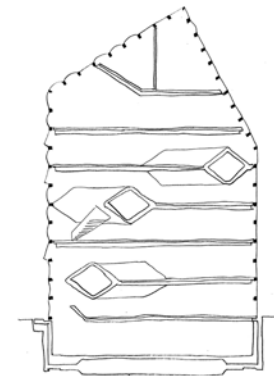
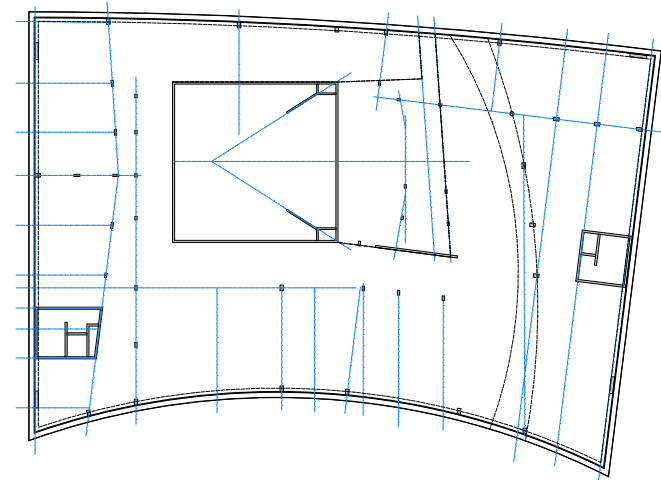
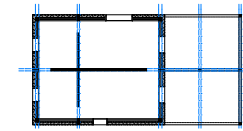
2.the twisted box – structure + skin

the twisted boxes modify the geometry. In this family, "the plans of buildings such as the signal box in Basel, the library of the BTU or the Laban center are deformed and their geometry complexified (...). Here, the unity of the building is not linked to the shape (of the box) anymore, but is constituted by the skin."(1) The structure and the skin become separate, independent realities. In plan, in space, constructively, the two can be developed separately in a dichotomic way.

3. formal unity – independent skin

Other projects, like the Prada Ayoama, complexify space in three dimensions. The skin becomes a structural reality of its own, with a own design process. Internal structure and skin are still independent realities, but together, they form a new unity.

1. "Concretion, abstraction: The place of design processes in the theory of architecture Case study: Herzog & De Meuron", Benoît Vandenbulcke, Archtheo conference, Istanbul, 2011



Herzog & De Meuron
House in tavole : the box - non structural stacking
Laban center - the twisted box, structure + skin
Prada Ayoama : formal unity / independent skin
drawings by Benoît Vandenbulcke

To this trio, I must add OMA and Lacaton&Vassal which have been recurrently discussed and referred to, though, after discussions with his supervising comitee, they won't be part of Benoît's formal research.

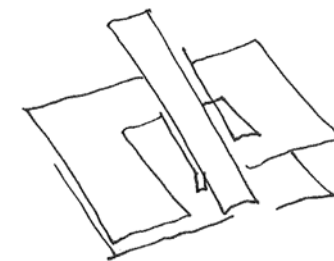
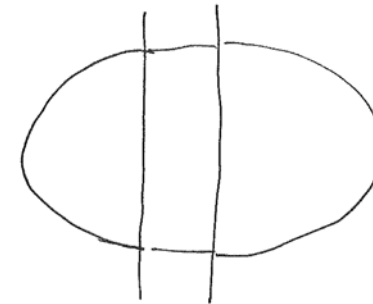
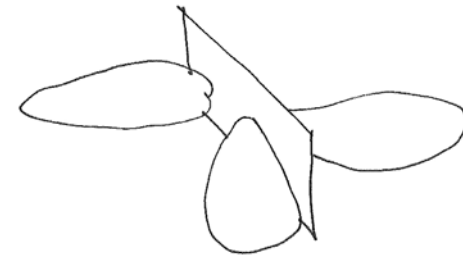
OMA is playing with the world's complexity by juxtaposition, complication and superposition. Koolhaas avoids to impose coherence to his work, because he fears it to be either cosmetic or the result of self-censorship. He prefers to give an account of what the world is, as it is, almost without filter.

There is a tension between the complexification and the sense of coherence of the whole, however. This was not researched and documented extensively, but we had the impression there are different mechanics.

Some projects propose a logic of "capturing" of heterogeneous items around a physical "vertebral column, like the long concrete wall of the Villa dall'Ava on which everything seems to be attached or glued.

Other projects work by juxtaposition inside a formally coherent shape (Euralille). Some other projects propose a very strong spatial continuity, that becomes the opportunity of the presence of all the heterogeneity of the world (Kunsthal Rotterdam). Of course, these strategies can overlap.

Lacaton & Vassal work with the potential use value of constructive solutions. For them, it seems that architecture has no meaning outside its useability. Every architectural act by them is powered by its capacity to maximize usable surface and flexibility. Materials are life enablers. They mostly use predetermined industrial solution and try to maximize their potential.



OMA

Villa dall'Ava : physical vertebral column

Euralille : formally coherent shape

Kunsthal : spatial continuity

drawings by Benoît Vandenbulcke

6b. Research Community

There is also a community of the “PhD-practice” and not only a community of the “architecture practice” (the two planes may intersect), that can be linked quite directly to the GRCs, the biannual Graduate Research Conferences.

First, there is something of a community through what people show and tell, and the discussions around it, which are inspiring and questioning. It is impossible to me to retrace exhaustively specific conversations or work shown.

Rather, I would like to give two different examples.

The first example refers to the community of peer researchers. I remember to have been quite interested by things shown by Lucas Devriendt. He showed a painting, a black square that in fact is a painting of a hanging black plastic, on which a shortfilm of the same painting in the changing light in his studio is superimposed. So at the same time it is a minimal black square, reminiscent of Malevitch, the Kaaba, the black reference square of dancers, and other similar references evoking a kind of absoluteness, of infinite potential and of absolute neutrality. At the same time, it is a figurative painting, very specific, unique and partial. This echoed with my own interest for multiple agendas of artifacts, and also was part of a common interest for this kind of black squares. Departing from a similar field of interest, he builds a very linear narrative in which each painting and exhibition is a new step, or has a proper role to play. In my case, this kind of storytelling is not present, it is more a kind of diffusion into the projects.

The second example is about the type of considerations that emerge from discussions from the panels. There have been some important discussions during the GRC’s that revealed or shifted things. For example, the fragment about the soap (cf Book I, chapter II, p68.) is transcribed from GRC EU 2011. It is an answer to a comment about the appearingly “conscious antimetaphysicality” of our practice. This appeared interesting to me because in my first GRCs, there were comments about a very loaded metaphysical concern and questions about the relevance of seeing architectural practice as a kind of architectural consequence of such concerns. The idea of multiple agendas, of simultaneity, was a revelation then.



Lucas Devriendt, zwart plastic, 2008

6c. Statistical Community

Last, I have to mention that the practice is heavily interlinked with images of architecture, artworks, of things that we see and use as a source of inspiration for the projects. There is no real analysis ongoing here, it is not an “in-depth-community”, but rather, through the shuffling through this kind of references, their use in projects, or their recurrence, they acquire a “statistical” relevance.

They are what we dream of, images we like and we do not really know why. Part of the work of the PhD, in the second book, tends to organize this collection and to make their relationships with the practice active. On which level, through which themes do they relate to our practice? In which way are they similar, in which way do they differ?

This community is “statistical”, because their action is probably stronger on the level of groups of references for general strategies and interests, rather than as individual references for specific projects. It is through the naming of their similarities and differences and the comparison with the practice that we are able to question them both.



Daan van Golden, Compositie met blauwe ruit, 1964
source : <http://www.culturgest.pt/actual/vangolden.html>

reference for the Deinze Cultural Center competition (2012)

7. Stepping outside architecture with architecture

The practice evolved over time. Shifts were localized, made explicit, explored further and questioned in a prospective way. Retrospectively, I differentiate various types of shifts.

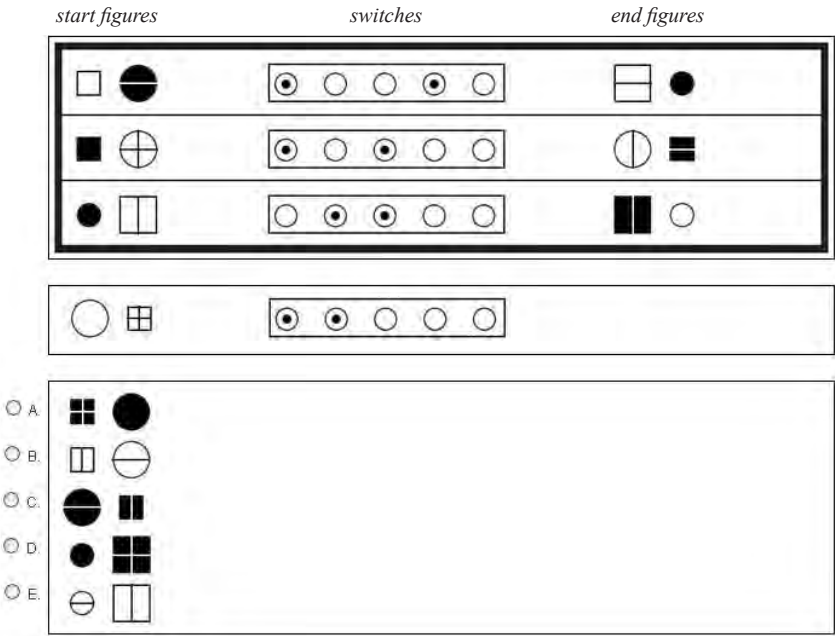
Some of the shifts described in this research are mainly triggered by and inside the practice. New situations, new projects, new issues produce new operational tools and/or new understandings of the relationships between these «tools». Call them simple shifts.

Some other shifts are influenced by a broader reality. The combination of readings, references, other activities or interests produce a shift in the approach of the practice, transforming the global framework of the practice. Complex shifts, like the shift described around the Metal project.

This PhD explores these kinds of shifts. However, I realize now that the practice is embedded is a complex reality, and that triggers certainly do act simultaneously on different levels. An interest in political issues like questioning the relevance of drastic energy policies, the investigation of some aspects the work of a Japanese architect, and perhaps even the too-long-lasting winter this year, provoke combined shifts that address issues that are not always situated inside the inner processes of architecture. Simultaneous transformations.

In consequence, the study that has been going on and is presented here is not the perfectly exhaustive and unfolding narrative of the practice. It only addresses limited but coherent groups of shifts.

simple shift	complex shift	simultaneous transformations
inside the practice	in and oustide the practice	in and oustide the practice
inside architecture	inwards architecture	outwards architecture
“péronnes shift”	“metal shift”	“new developments?”



non verbal logical tests (simultaneous transformations)

Since the office's foundation in 2003, we are in a process of defining an attitude in the field. Obviously, ten years later, this attitude is still evolving and shifting. However, I notice that the developed praxemes address mainly the internal processes of the making of architecture. It is about the definition of a concept, about structures and materials, about spatiality and relationship to the context.

All these issues are apolitical. Well, not completely, because the definition of a pertinent attitude in a deconstructed field and a complex world is in itself a political statement. But it remains strictly bound to the internal mechanisms of architecture.

Recently, we entered a proposal for a cultural center in Deinze, nearby Ghent. After the presentation, I was wondering what the concept was of the project. We could explain everything, but we found it hard to define the «concept» of the project. Then I realized that the concept was perhaps the very identification to the 5 praxemes simultaneously, which we had represented in the competition through reference to the cocktail sculpture by Ann-Veronica Jannssens.

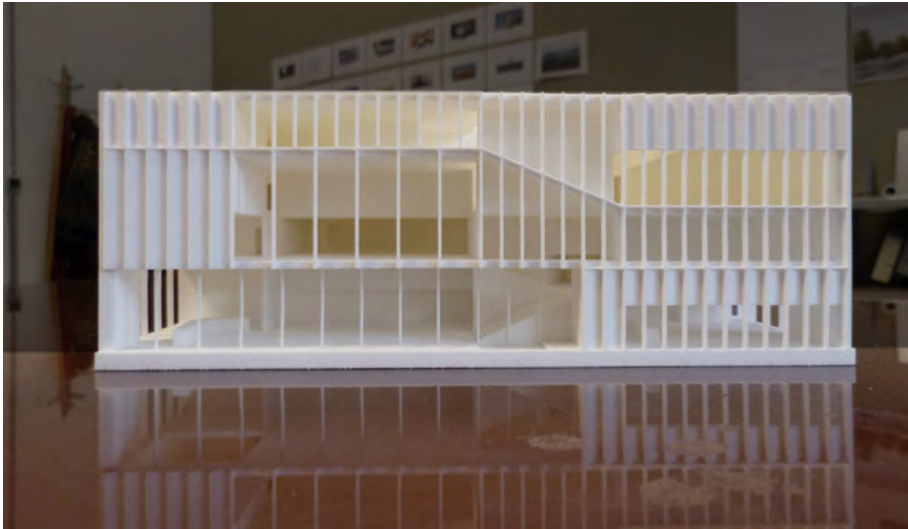
So, in a way, if the project is the embodiment of its concept, and its concept is the application of the design strategies of the practice, there is a kind of circularity being developed, like a snake biting its own tail. The temptation is great to consider the project as an overarching project, illustrating the full potential of the 5 praxemes.

Maybe it could be, but it probably won't be very helpful. When a model is established, the challenge becomes to break it, to go beyond, to use it as a jumping board to explore other dimensions, and not to make comfortable use of its well greased mechanics.

Also, it would give the impression that the chart is a closed system, which I do not believe is true. Before explaining this, I'll illustrate the Deinze project through the 5 praxemes.



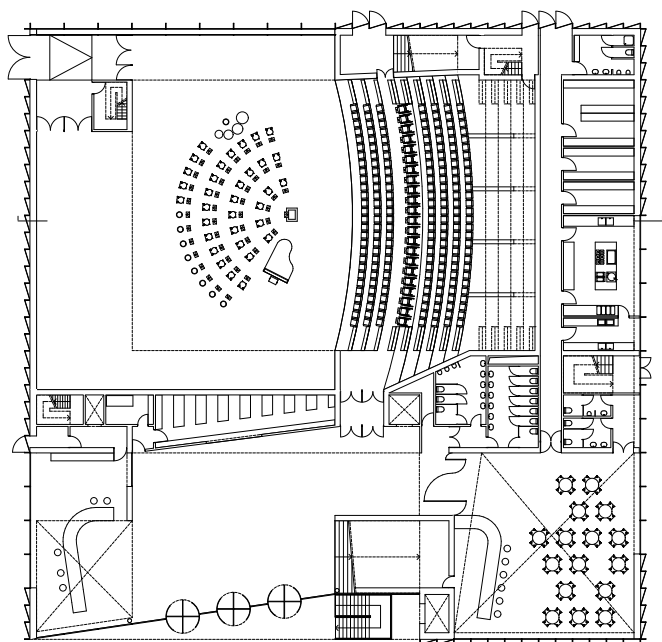
*Deinze, 2009
south elevation*



*Deinze, 2009
Model, 3D print*



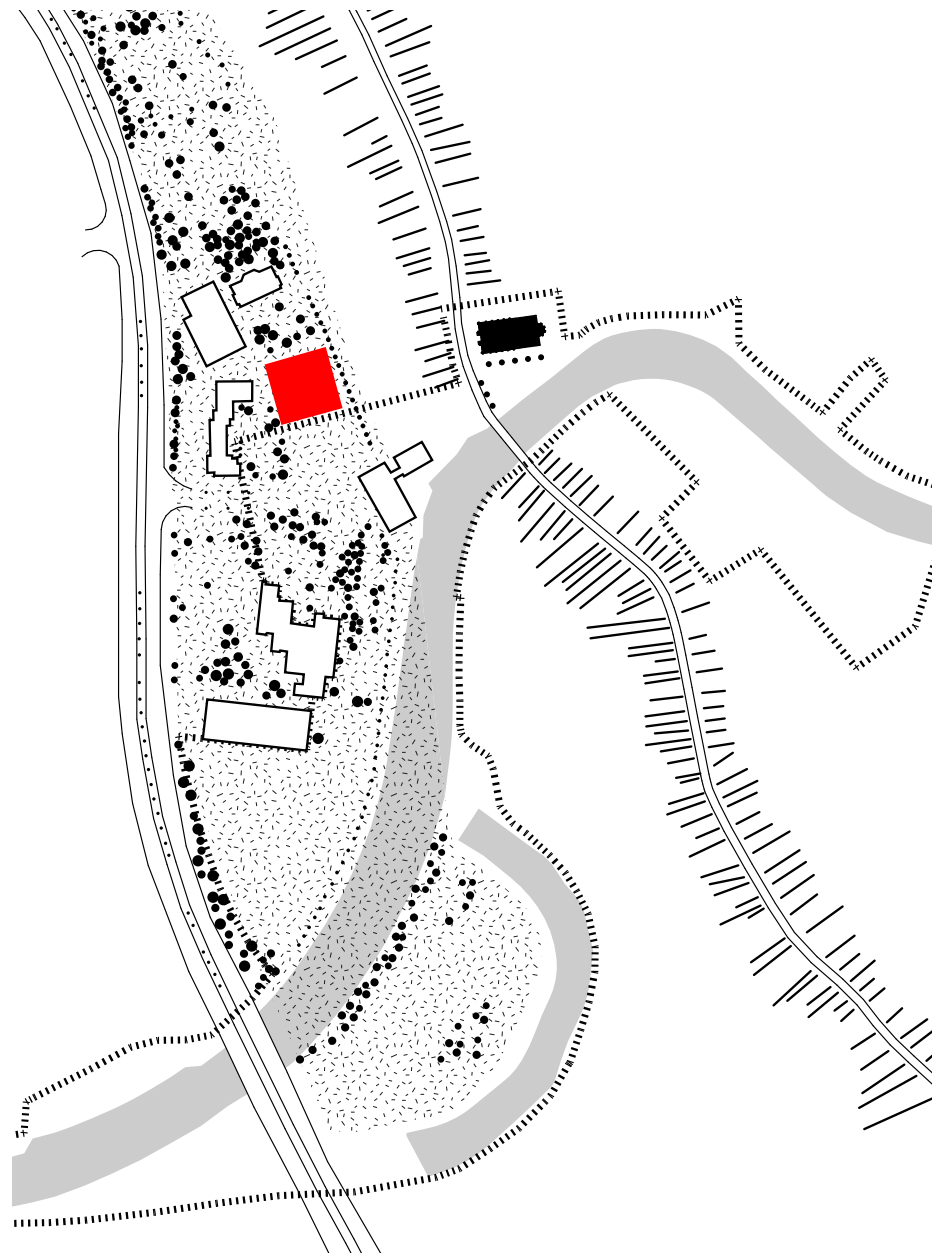
*Deinze, 2009
Metaphorical Specificity : the coincidence of the 5 praxemes
Cocktail Sculpture, Ann Veronica Janssens, 2009*



0 5 10m

Deinze, 2009

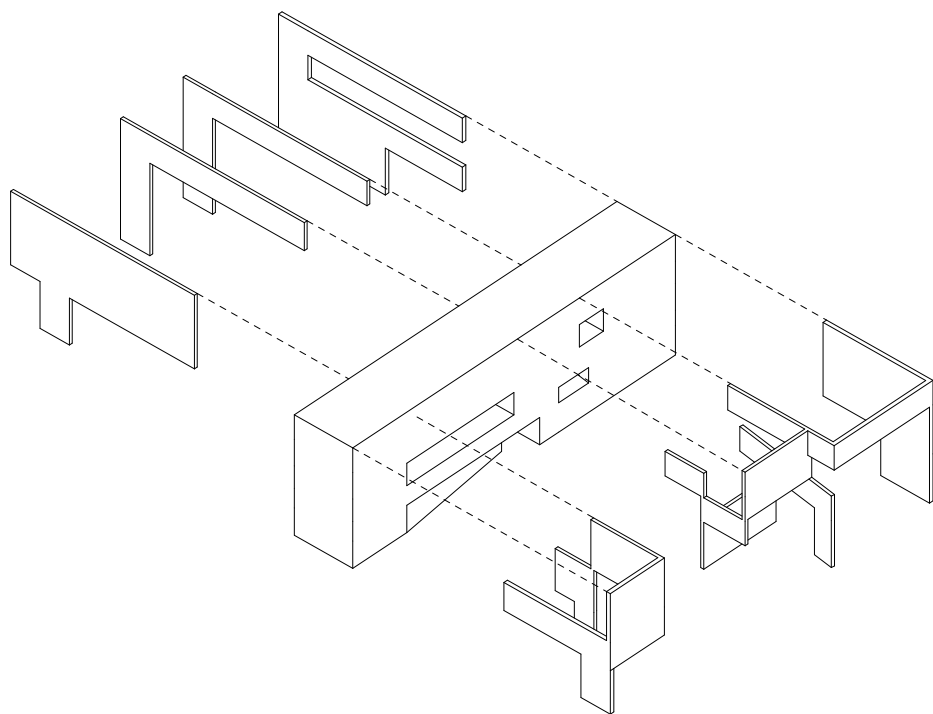
*Spatial Genericity : a three-dimensional spatial puzzle
plan of the first floor*



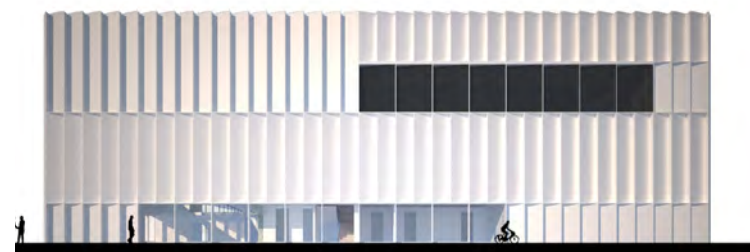
Deinze, 2009

Contextual Autonomy

*reinforcement of the succession of public spaces along the river and of the green strip
situation plan*



Deinze, 2009
*Flexible structural principles & coincidence of structure and architecture:
 a set of beams and veils, a closed core, a spatial stacking of concrete walls
 Structural axonometry*



Deinze, 2009
*Language through Materiality : geometricality enabling material variety
 inverted curtain wall, steel sheets, sun screens
 elevation renderings*

Unlike the Deinze project suggests, the chart is not necessarily a closed system.

I noticed in recent projects that political dimensions are becoming more and more important in our practice, like additional, independent layers. I will illustrate this briefly through three projects on three different scales. My intention here is simply to open up a possible development of the practice that might challenge the chart as it has been developed up to now.

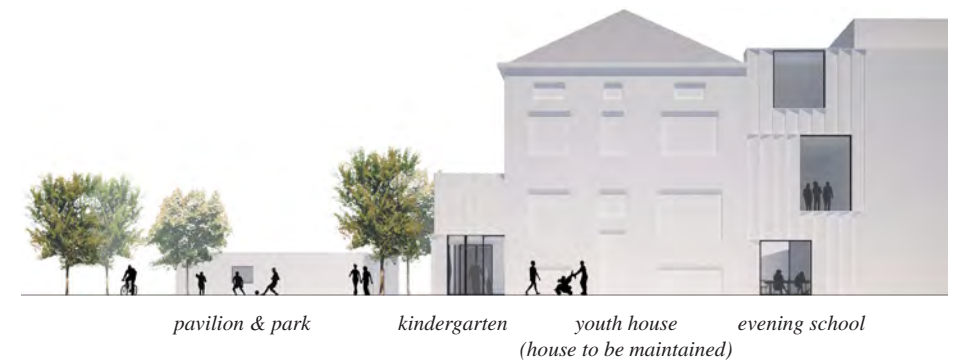
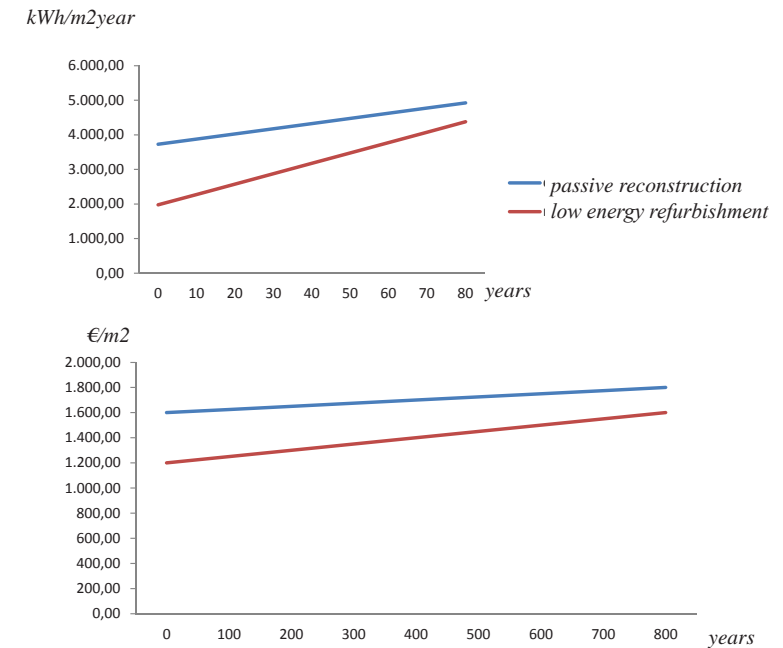
The project for the Zebypass is currently being developed as a temporary installation in a very complicated crossroads in the center of Brussels. The pedestrian crossings are prolonged and curved to form one single shape that transforms the entire crossroads into one single, multidirectional pedestrian crossing. It is probably possible to detect the praxemes at work in this project. Though, what strikes me here is that it addresses the issue of mobility, of the place of pedestrians in the city, and serves as a signal for the underlying subway station.



Zebypass, AgwA, 2012

For the competition entry for a kindergarten, a homework school and other multi-purpose spaces, which had to be housed in a brand new, passive-standard building after demolishing existing buildings, we proposed to maintain some valuable buildings to host the program. Not only for patrimonial reasons, because the master house was quite interesting, but because parts of the program fitted well the available space, and first of all, because the sustainable approach of the project, inherent in the brief, was totally contradictory with the proposed consequence of demolition of the buildings.

Indeed, some calculations showed that the money cost of demolishing and reconstruction compared to the energy savings could only be recovered over a period of 1600 years. The energy savings compared to the grey energy of a new construction could only be recovered over a period of 80 years, much longer than any indications available about the long term robustness of highly insulated and air-proof buildings.

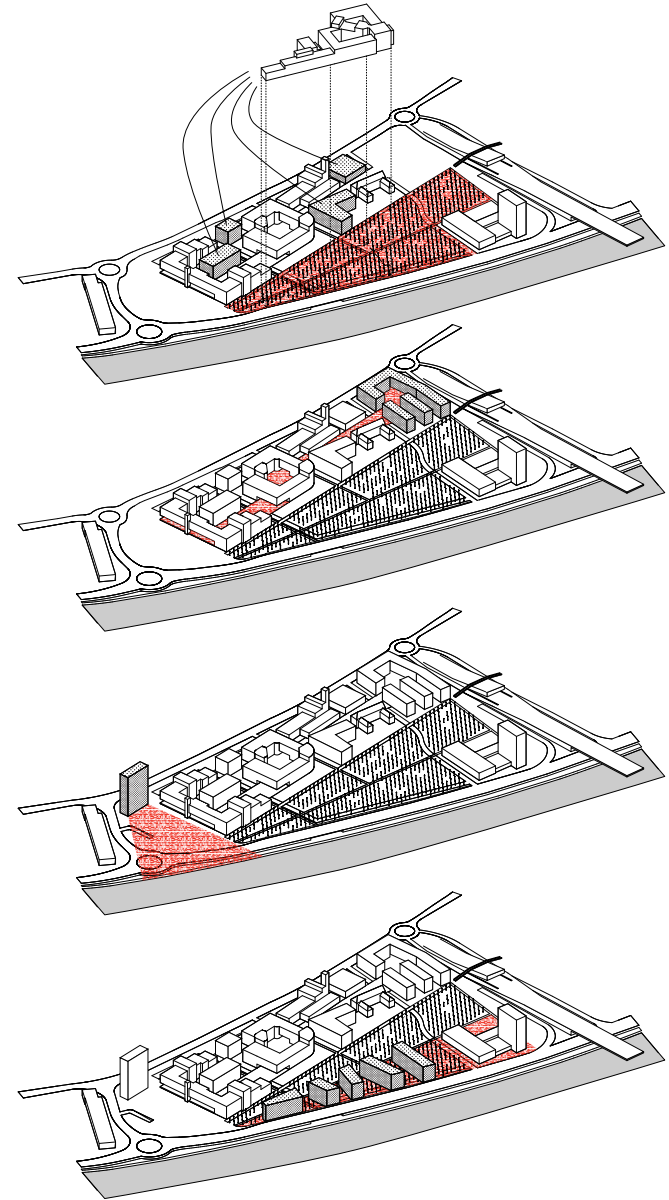


Bonnevie, AgwA + Z-ed, 2012
Energy cost of reconstruction versus refurbishment
including grey energy

The Val Benoît is an ancient site of the ULG (Liege University) that is to be redeveloped as an «economic village». The site hosts three huge buildings from the early XXth century, that should be refurbished for patrimonial reasons. The site is redeveloped by a public institution who state that they «don't seek rentability as a primary goal». We were quite shocked by this affirmation: why should public money not be invested well? Is sustainability not also financial?

In order to achieve this global sustainability, it seemed to us that a more profound restructuring of the site was necessary. First, all the buildings proposed the same typology, which is not very flexible and fitted for the intended businesses. Then, the exterior space lacked identity and useability, and the disposition of the buildings made it impossible to use or develop the available ground. We stated that the gross surface of the existing buildings was greater than the office take-up of the city, so we had to be careful with the programming of the site.

We proposed the demolition of one of the buildings along the Meuse river, and the densification of the north part of the site, which will be linked by a tramway to the city center. The radically open space along the river can now be developed or sold to developers.



*Val Benoît, AgwA + NGiA, 2011
Redevelopment of the Val Benoît, Liege*

These considerations do not correspond the internal praxemes of architectures I developed in this PhD. We are entering a political, ecological, ethical, economical field, sustained by a well established, flexible and evolutive architectural attitude.

Now, I wonder if it would be possible to uncover some coherence behind the 'political issues' addressed by these projects. It is about sustainability, of course, but how is this addressed? Through which mechanisms? Also, I wonder if this questions and modifies the way we embrace formal, spatial and constructive aspects of the design practice? Or on the contrary, does it somehow proceed from our design attitude?

I remember two comments we had some time ago from fellow architects about our practice. If I remember well, one defined our approach as «radical bricolage» and the other as «architecture of opportunities». Perhaps there is something there that is of interest, and that allows to embrace equally the architectural aspects developed in this research, and the political aspects.

The architectural, material, spatial systems that are developed through the practice always have some kind of inherent flexibility, that allow to adapt to contingencies, or, if we put it upside down, to grasp opportunities without derogation. Equally, we could say the complex pedestrian crossing of Zebrapass, the preservation of the house in Bonnevie, and the liberation of development land and densification in Val Benoît, are opportunities that appear thanks to the encounter of specific situations and flexible systems.

Bibliography

- Koolhaas, R., 1995, 'S, M, L, XL', 010 Publishers, Rotterdam
- Ponge F, 1941, "Le parti pris des choses", Gallimard
- Ponge F, 1965, "pour un Malherbe", NRF
- Ponge F, 1961, "Méthodes", Gallimard
- Ponge F, 1967, «Le Savon», Gallimard
- Ponge F, 1967, «La rage de l'expression», Gallimard
- Ponge F, 1977, «Comment une figue de paroles et pourquoi», Gallimard
- Vandenbulcke B, 2011, "Concretion, abstraction: the place of materials in architectural design processes. Case study: Peter Zumthor", Detroit, 2011
- Vandenbulcke B, 2012, "Concretion, abstraction : the place of design processes in today architecture practice. case study : SANAA", Benoît Vandenbulcke, ICAUD, Tirana
- Vandenbulcke B, 2011, "Concretion, abstraction: The place of design processes in the theory of architecture Case study: Herzog & De Meuron", Archtheo conference, Istanbul
- Fallon H., 2010, "Four study cases on skins and structures", Harold Fallon, ICSA, Universidade do Minho, Guimaraes
- Fallon, H, 2007, "sensemaker 1", <http://www.agwa.be/sensemaker>
- Fallon H, 2007, "sensemaker 2", <http://www.agwa.be/sensemaker2>
- Fallon H, 2012, "Shifting practice: Metal, Zumthor, the Baroque, Deleuze, Foucault", ICAUD, Epoka University
- Fallon H, Vandenbulcke B, 2009, "Squares", Communicating (by) Design, Sint Lucas, Brussels
- Fallon H, 2011, "crooked discursive paths", Harold Fallon, 2011, Archtheo, Istanbul
- Fallon H, 2008, "Kortlezer By Design For Design", in Reflections 9
- SCHAIK, L. V. 2003. The Practice of Practice: research in the medium of design, Melbourne, RMIT University Press.
- SCHAIK, L. V. 2005. Mastering Architecture: Becoming a Creative Innovator in Practice (Architecture in Practice), John Wiley and Sons.
- SCHAIK, L. V. 2008. Spatial Intelligence: New futures for architecture, Chichester, UK, John Wiley & Sons.
- SCHAIK, L. V. & JOHNSON, A. (eds.) 2011 By Practice, By Invitation: Design Practice Research at RMIT. Melbourne: onepointsixone.
- SCHAIK, L. V. & SPOONER, M. (eds.) 2010. The Practice of Practice 2: Research in the Medium of Design, Melbourne: School of Architecture and Design, RMIT University.
- Deleuze g, 1988, «Le Pli, Leibniz et le Baroque»
- Foucault M, 1971, "L'ordre du discours", Gallimard
- Foucault M, 1966, «Les mots et les choses», Gallimard
- Reinhardt A, 1963, "Autocritique de Reinhardt", reprinted as Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt, New York: Viking Press, 1975